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Gertrude Bone.
Stephen Bone

Mr. Paul

MR. PAUL

BY GERTRUDE BONE

THE ILLUSTRATIONS CUT ON THE WOOD BY STEPHEN BONE

JONATHAN CAPE, ELEVEN GOWER STREET
LONDON
MCMXXI

By the same Author

PROVINCIAL TALES	Duckworth & Co.
CHILDREN'S CHILDREN	„
WOMEN OF THE COUNTRY	„
THE BROW OF COURAGE *(Stories for Children)*	„
THE FURROWED EARTH *(Poems)*	Chatto & Windus

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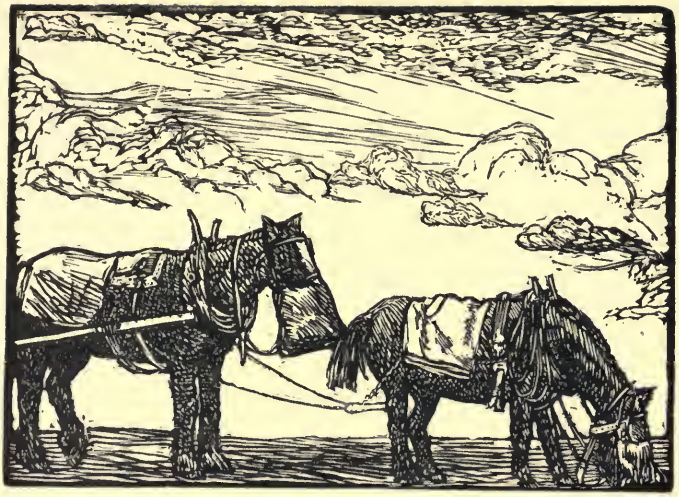
Mr. Paul



Chapter I

IT was one of those February mornings which follow a night of lashing rain; when rills run down the sides of every lane, and patches of flood-water gleam in every meadow; when the soaked boles of the trees shine as though forged of silver and bulging rain-clouds carry fulminous edges; when the sunshine pours itself in such triumph it would seem as though no cloud could ever efface its splendour, only to be followed and overtaken by a sky so heavy with rain that the light seems eclipsed at mid-day.

On such a day starlings sit bolt upright on bare

branches and utter little clacking noises. Steaming horses drag loads of manure to the soaked fields. Fallow ground shows streaks of ploughing. Primroses appear in sheltered nooks, and the whirring of birds' wings on their way to their nesting-places is incessant. The lengthening of the daylight gives one a new sensation of leisure, as if more hours have actually been added to the day, and the softness of the air brings to one the feeling of a renewal, almost of a convalescence.

In one of those low-lying parts of the country at the foot of gentle hills, where osiers fringe slow-moving streams and pollard willows shake gigantic fists at a tranquil heaven, lies one of those country inns to be found on a quiet high-road between two villages. The " Buck i' th' Vine " was an inn of an unobtrusive sort, being, in fact, no more than a cottage with its front parlour turned into a bar. A wooden painted sign, weather-worn and undecipherable, was fastened to the whitewashed wall above the front door. The cottage garden with its flagged path remained unchanged. Another painted sign upon the top of a post stood a few feet from the wicket gate. An old retriever perpetually slept about the doorway, whose flagged step was decorated with curls and twists in white clay. An untidy servant-girl did duty as barmaid during the day, coming in from her scrubbing at the back of the house, with sleeves rolled up and bare elbows, to

serve the occasional carter who reined in his horse at the gate. At night, when the men were home from the fields, the inn-keeper, John Fryatt, who was also a market-gardener, served his customers himself.

Inside, the paper of the bar was very old and dingy. It had once been white, with the gilt flowers and stripes befitting the decoration of a front parlour, but now its stained and torn splendour was hidden by many irrelevant ornaments. A stuffed owl occupied a shelf in the corner. There was a macramé bracket in the corner opposite to the stuffed owl. The family had no trophies of needlework, no samplers on the wall. Several photographs of ten years back and "The Stag at Bay" hung in the centre above the hob-grate, which had a spittoon at each corner of the hearth-stone. A round table of the kind that tilts up and is put away when not in use stood in the middle of the floor, and several wooden chairs with wheel-backs were pushed against the wall.

On this February morning, three men were sitting in the bar, their glasses of bitter on the round table. Their teams and loads of rough timber for the station three miles distant were outside, and they themselves sitting, not with legs stretched out straight in front after the manner of countrymen when their work is done, but on the edge of their chairs with an elbow on the table.

John Fryatt was himself behind the bar this morning, the heavy showers making work impossible in the garden and the slatternly servant being occupied in " cleaning-down."

The three were thus seated, not engaged in conversation precisely, but in the mental attitude of attention should any of them wish to say anything, when the door opened with the rending of a bell and a man entered, walking straight to the bar. He was a tall man inclined to leanness, and was greeted by John Fryatt as Mr. Turner. He was well dressed and wore leather leggings. His features were quite good though the eyes were unresponding and never smiled with the rest of his face, keeping always a hard, rather keen expression. He drew out a leather purse to give change to Fryatt for some old account, the reason for his visit. He replied curtly to one of the wagoners who wished him good-morning, but in such a way that one saw it to be his usual manner and from no personal dislike of the man. His whole behaviour, from his direct entrance, his short questions as to way-bills, his manner of being entirely absorbed in his business, all pointed to the fact that he wished to be taken for a man as little like the loitering beer-drinking wagoners as possible. But the peasant, considering his fellow-creatures over his beer, is seldom deceived by those who have gone to school with him and grown up under

his eyes, and the airs of a business man which Turner endeavoured to diffuse around him did not impress either John Fryatt or his companions. They knew him as Bill Turner, who kept a baker's shop with a growing custom in the adjoining village. He was reputed to be "near," because, though well-to-do, he and his wife managed the shop and family of seven without any servant or occasional woman. He had a reputation also as a noisy upholder of morals and the married state. His wife, thin and active, supported him in his small economies. She had a large respect for him as a business man and became a willing and loyal subordinate. In the work of their house and shop she was helped by her eldest girl, a precocious, observant child of fourteen, who already formed her own judgments and formed them after the manner of her parents, not, one felt, because it was the atmosphere surrounding her, but because her nature was in miniature that of theirs. All their children seemed to have the same quality. They were docile and worked hard, finding no difficulty in following the work chosen for them by their father, and duly handing over their earnings to their mother to be put in the savings bank every Saturday night.

The three men drinking in the bar of the Buck i' th' Vine were disposed to be critical towards a man who had taken to trade. As a

matter of fact, at any time of the day one of themselves or their wives might walk into Turner's shop and order bread or cakes and Turner would have to serve them with the same civility as other people. He was, therefore, in a manner dependent on their goodwill. They could complain of his bread or prices, or even return goods to him if they were not satisfied. As he stood at the bar talking to Fryatt they did not consider that his clothes or manners made him in any way superior to themselves, only slowly wondered within themselves how much money he was making and whether he was putting by.

Suddenly Turner seemed to become aware that the impression he meant to convey had failed and that the silent beer-drinkers were offering to him not admiration but criticism. He threw two coins on the counter.

"Glass of bitter," he said, turning and seating himself on a chair vacant beside the window.

"Windy outside, isn't it?" vouchsafed one of the men, since Turner was going to drink with them.

"Windy atop of the wagons, eh?" replied Turner, with a short effort after jocularity.

"Much the same atop of the bread-van, I should say," returned the short carter, whose name was Jerry Greenwood and who didn't like Turner.

"There's wind enough to go round," interposed

Fryatt peaceably, "*and* to spare," he added facetiously. "I thought as I lay in bed last night there'd be some damage to reckon up before morning, but I've not heard of any up to now."

"Two trees blown down at Ruston's, I heerd of," put in the tallest of the carters, and immediately gulped what remained of his beer to cover his inadvertent entry into the conversation.

"Ruston's putting a lot of money into that place," said Fryatt.

Turner gave a short contemptuous laugh. "Throwing it away, I should call it," he said. "New gates and fences all over the place! Old ones not fancy enough seemingly. Why, there wasn't one of them fences he's taken down that wasn't fit to last for years yet, and gates too."

"He's making a smart place of it now," said Fryatt. "Good thing he's got the money to spend on it, for he spends good money everywhere."

"He'd better save his money and spend it on the land than on all that fancy-work," grunted Turner.

"It's his own money, I suppose," said Jerry, in a loud aside.

"It's been a good thing for Sam Perry, all that carrying backwards and forwards of stuff," put in Fryatt, loud enough to avert a retort; "and no end to be seen of it yet apparently.

There's not much of a trade to be done in carrying in a place like this. Trains is few and the farmers has their own traps, and village people mostly walks unless they has parcels. There's not much to be made out of carrying, taking it all round."

"There's as good a trade to be done here as at Firwood," said Turner, rising and stretching himself. "Perry's a fool, that's what it is. Lounging about! A lad of sixteen could work up a business here and save money on it."

"And better a man that's been doing the work for twenty years," said Jerry Greenwood, with a snort.

"Twenty years or forty if it's a fool like Perry," retorted Turner noisily.

"A man that's had a business twenty years ought to know something about it," put in the tall wagoner, as if propounding a problem to himself.

"I should say so," said Jerry. "Let them that's so clever try it themselves."

"I bet if I was to take it in hand I'd run Perry's business and my own as well! Yes, and ruin him in two years!" said Turner, wheeling round on the other in a bullying way.

"Likely," sneered Jerry Greenwood.

The other men stopped in their drinking. John Fryatt himself leaned on his elbows on the counter, interested. A bet seemed to be going

forward. Slow to move himself the peasant is an incomparable spectator of action. The four men brought their minds to the matter before them.

"I tell you I *could* do it! Yes and I *will* do it, too," said Turner, with increasing heat.

"A man that's been going twenty years," repeated the other stubbornly.

"Twenty years or forty, I tell you," interrupted Turner, snarling. "Give me two years and Perry'll be in the workhouse."

"And *I* say that a man that's been going twenty years isn't so easy ruined," reiterated Jerry. "It stands to reason," he added obstinately.

"Will you make it a bet?" demanded Turner, settling his hat on his head.

"I'll bet you a new hat," retorted the other with contempt. "I shall be needing one in about two years' time, if I'm alive."

"Done!" said Turner. "About the size and colour of the one I've got on will be the thing, I fancy."

"I don't like this sort of thing," put in the old wagoner suddenly. "Why can't everybody do their own and not interfere with other people! I can't do with this taking away a man's living."

"*He'll* not take away anybody's living, you needn't be frightened, Jimmy," said Greenwood.

"Them that lives to see the day'll see it," said Turner. "Good-day, Fryatt! Good-day all!" he said, resuming his curt and domineering manner.

Fryatt was the only man who responded, and a certain consternation seemed to sit on the spirits of the men as Turner left the inn. The old wagoner, Jimmy, was the first to speak. He broke out as the door closed and Turner's feet were heard crunching the sanded passage. He spoke in short disturbed sentences.

"I can't do with this—taking away a man's living behind his back—talking of ruining a person—why *anybody* might be doing it, and you none the wiser."

The other men were visibly uneasy. They seemed to think there was something in what the old man said and that it made for a very uncomfortable state of things.

Jerry Greenwood laughed.

"Look here, Jimmy," he said, "Do you think I'd have taken his bet if I'd thought he had a chance, and Perry a friend of my own, too?"

"There's something not right about it," replied Jimmy, unconvinced. "Once you begin you never know where it'll end."

"Taking away a man's living isn't right," agreed the tall wagoner.

"No, it isn't," said Jimmy decidedly.

"Oh, he hasn't done it yet!" said Fryatt, "and if you was to ask me I should say he never will. He's his own business to attend to, hasn't he? Well then, there you are! How's he going to get the time to trip up Perry? Don't you worry, Jimmy!"

"Bill Turner thinks he's only got to shout and everybody'll be frightened," said Greenwood. "But he's mistaken himself this time. *I'm* not frightened of Bill Turner and I say he'll fail in his bet, and then'll be the time for laughing. Why, Perry's been going for twenty years, and so I told him."

"Made the business he did, too," said Jimmy, reminiscent.

"A man that's made a business won't be ruined easy," assented the tall wagoner.

"Not him," said Greenwood. "Besides, it isn't as though he won't be aware of it. First thing we make it our business to do is to tell Perry and let him have a good laugh. He's plenty of friends to help him, and we can all rally round the old flag, in a manner of speaking."

"And if Perry knows he'll have a chance," said Jimmy, comforted.

"Never had nothing else but a chance," said Greenwood, rising and feeling in his pockets. "I fancy myself in a new hat," he added.

"Yes, you could do with one all right," assented

Jimmy, without any humorous intention. He rose and drew from the depths of a hip-pocket which seemed to be without bottom a handful of coppers, which he surveyed solemnly as they lay on his wide-open palm before selecting the two necessary for payment. The tall wagoner went through a similar process. Jerry Greenwood opened the door and the men saw through a slanting silver rain that a tarpaulin had blown loose from one of the wagons. Holding their hats against a sudden gust they ran to secure it. Then with a straining of horses' flanks and a pushing of men against shafts and wheels, the three loads were got under way in the wet road between the coppiced hedges.

Chapter 2

MARY HUNISET was going home in the early evening after a day's work. She was one of those women who go out to work, not from necessity, but from a desire to gain information of the affairs of the various houses in which she was employed. The greatest gossip in the village, she stood to the countryside in the stead of a local newspaper, and if at any time she was seen to be depressed, it was when the good behaviour of the country servants had obliged her to stay in her own home for any length of time, for it was the lapses and notices of the latter which made Mrs. Huniset's opportunities for work and gossip.

She was a large woman, stout and black-eyed, with magnificent black hair. Very smiling and self-important, her quick eyes peered into every corner. The outside appearance of comfortable, good-natured kindness which she carried so easily, was really a self-indulgence of complacence at being in the heart of the newsmongering and gossip of the village and country. A special satisfaction in her aspect as she went about, disclosed to the conversant that somebody's character

was discovered to be specked and that Mrs. Huniset had the ins and outs of it. No injury was felt so deeply, no scolding resented so much, as a snub in the recital of a piece of scandal or doubt as to the veracity of a spicy bit of information she carried about the village. She was not always in a hurry to disclose her news. She gained an even greater satisfaction in hearing it from others and being able to say that she had known it before—*not* the precise tale which was current, it was true, but since she had it from Mrs. So-and-So, who was the cousin of the person in question, she had no doubt but that she had the correct version; and since the version she held had lain in her mind maturing in shape and substance, it was always listened to as being a trifle more damaging than the first repeated tale.

On this particular evening she was passing close to a labourer's cottage in a hollow beside a small plantation. Three lanes led down to its gate from different quarters, and it seemed, from its very situation at the meeting of these roads, to be a place at which to stop, even if the mistress of the cottage had not been standing outside the dirty yard, a short square figure with hands on hips, looking up intently into an ash-tree on the edge of the plantation. As Mrs. Huniset approached she turned her head long enough

to ejaculate "Chick up the tree," and resumed her gazing.

"Did you ever!" exclaimed Mrs. Huniset, looking upward. "To think of its going up there! Come down, impudence! Shoo! Shoo! Well, you are a piece of trouble!" she added, as the white, scraggy fowl cocked its head and, looking at her, hopped deliberately higher in the tree branch by branch, as though mountaineering.

The idea of anything, to whomsoever it belonged, getting lost, was at once grasped completely and resented by Mrs. Huniset, whose whole stout person became full of activity as she stooped for a stone to throw up into the tree. The stone thrown by her, with a leap of her body and bounce of her many petticoats, fell upon a cow lying in the field, which rose indignantly, while the hen, judging from the disturbance beneath the tree that battle was declared, cackled and mounted higher with a squawk. The other woman, Mrs. Walters, more definitely set upon recovering her property and chastising the miscreant, threw a stick with greater accuracy at the same moment, with the result that the fowl gave an astonished leap and screech and found itself flying towards the ground in the manner of a parachute, alighting finally on the backs of the crowded hens, an unwilling angel-visitant. Mrs. Walters, picking up another stick from the

ground, laid about her among the fowls, who scattered, startled and noisy, from beneath her feet.

Both women laughed loudly, and having laughed together were disposed to be confidential, since nothing disposes to mutual goodwill so much as the discomfiture of something other than oneself.

"That's Jack again!" said Mrs. Walters, "always leaving the gate open!"

"They're all alike," said Mrs. Huniset. "What do you think our Tommy did last night?" and at Mrs. Walters' look of inquiry, continued with the zest of a gossip who has found a listener.

"I was out to work, you know, at that Mrs. Adams's—she ain't much—you never saw anything like the servants she's had this last year. She never *can* keep a servant. Well, you know, it stands to reason girls won't stop there, always popping in and out of the kitchen like she does; you must think of yourself some time. Well, as I was saying, I was out to work, and I just stopped a bit on the road to speak to that woman at Matthews's—she asked me, you see, about that man that's just gone to work at Ruston's, and I was just spelling over the history of it with her, and when I got home him and the boy had been in and had their tea, and you know he never can keep awake for long when he gets by the fire, so he'd gone to sleep in his chair, with Tommy there

sitting on the stool opposite, and you know how silly men is when they go to sleep, nothing'll wake 'em, and there was Tommy sitting with nothing to do but mischief——" Mrs. Huniset, broke off to giggle and Mrs. Walters smiled in anticipation—"Well," resumed Mrs. Huniset tittering, "he put his head back in his chair and of course his mouth come open when he did that, and when I come into the kitchen there, if Tommy hadn't been into the scullery and got a glass of water and was pouring it into Huniset's mouth. *That* woke him and it woke his temper too, I can tell you," and again Mrs. Huniset became speechless with laughter.

"Well, I never!" said Mrs. Walters, with short titterings. "And what did he do? My man would have laid about him pretty quick, I can tell you!"

"He made Tommy wash in cold water before he went to bed," said Mrs. Huniset. "Such a set-out as there was."

Mrs. Walters, a taciturn, rather gloomy woman, looked as though the world suddenly held more entertaining things than she had given it credit for.

"You never know what they'll be at next, do you?" she said.

"I tell you I've had a time with them three boys of mine. Why, when I took Jacky down to

Dr. Highfould, when he put his hand in the threshing machine—all tore down the back it was—' What have you been up to now ? ' says the doctor. ' My word, Sir, it does plunge,' says Jacky. ' I should think it did ! ' says the doctor. ' Why can't you leave things alone ? ' but first he says : ' What have you been up to *now* ? ' ' Working, Sir ! ' says Jacky as plumb as paint. The doctor he laughed. ' Yes,' he said, ' I can see you've been working all right. Well, you'll just take a holiday from that kind of work,' he says, and Jacky he comes straight home and tells his dad he's to have a nice holiday. Such a how d'ye do we had over it."

" One's enough for me," said Mrs. Huniset. " I don't know how people manages with more. I says to him when Tommy was born—' One's enough,' I says. ' It's enough for *me*,' he says. ' If there's any more of this sort of thing I'm going away,' he says. ' I wants no more hollering and roaring,' he says. Fancy him saying that to me," said Mrs. Huniset, with a titter. " ' Well,' I answers him back, ' look at Mary Perry with nine. How'd you like to be Sam ? ' I says to him."

" ' I shouldn't like it at all,' says he. ' That's what's made her head so weak. We can't do with yours no weaker than it is,' he says.

" ' Go along with you ! ' I says. They do say," went on Mrs. Huniset, with unction, " that

Perry beats her when she's like that. I heard she'd gone funny again the other day, so I just called in to ask if her hens was laying, and you never saw such a dirty place, and she saying her prayers and the baby eating treacle with its fingers. I think it's a shame a man coming home to a place like that. Why, if I was to go on like that I don't know what he'd say. Why, it was only Wednesday night I thought I saw Mary Warren that was, and I got up on the bank to catch her before she went by, and I slipped and, oh, I *did* hurt my back, and in the morning I says to him: 'You've got to get up and light the fire! I'm too poorly,' I says, and do you know what he did? He just rolled me over and over till I rolled right out of bed! He *did*!"

The vision of Mrs. Huniset's stout person being rolled over and off the bed tickled Mrs. Walters once more.

"She can't help it, you know," she replied, returning to Mary Perry; "she always was meek-hearted as a girl, and she's gone queer since she's had all them children, nine one after the other, as fast as she could."

"She's a nice-looking woman, too," said Mrs. Huniset. "You'd never think she had these queer turns."

"She didn't come from anywhere here, did she?" asked Mrs. Walters, though the question,

since she knew perfectly well where Mary Perry came from, was evidently to continue the conversation and extract as much more information as was available.

"No," answered Mrs. Huniset. "Her father was a farrier over by Wiston. Perry was ostler at the Ring o' Bells. It was *his* father that set Perry up in this carrying business. You see, they *did* say," she proceeded, with the complacent smile which marked any damaging detail, "that he picked up the money for it, picked it up, *you* know. You can't say so, or Perry'd summons you, but where he got the money to buy them horses and trap is a funny thing. He was only a blacksmith, you know," she went on in a high emphatic voice as though she had been contradicted, "and there's Perry suddenly with a horse and trap and a bus. You can't do that sort of thing," she concluded, in a tone both satisfied and indignant.

At that moment advancing footsteps made both women turn, and there emerged from the fast-increasing shadow of the lane the figure of a man in vigorous middle-age, dressed in black clerical garments and swinging a stick. So overflowing was the expression of kindness and candour which shone in the face of the new-comer that the faces of both women unawares reflected a similar quality; that of Mrs. Walters became almost kind

and that of Mrs. Huniset almost candid as they replied, "Good night, Sir," to his greeting. He passed on, turning to the right, and the colloquy of the women having been interrupted, each thought suddenly of matters awaiting their attention, and bidding each other good night, separated, Mrs. Huniset making a quickly-spent attempt to run, and Mrs. Walters tramping through the muddy yard to disappear within her slatternly cottage.

Chapter 3

THE Rev. Enoch Paul, whose appearance in the lane had parted the two gossips, was a nonconformist preacher who lived in a town some ten miles distant, but who had charge of a small place of worship near the village of Wiat. He was a countryman of humble birth who had been educated and entered the church in which he had been born, as its minister.

The man whose mere greeting in the lane had kindled a transitory human expression on the hard faces of the gossips, was now middle-aged. But in spite of his twenty years' experience of the small concerns, the chatter and agitation of an uneducated community, its alarms at an unusual occurrence, its sudden suspicions and quarrels and friendships, he had never really become distrustful, which is equivalent to saying that he had never really grown up. The gaiety and buoyancy of nature which puzzled some, were a matter of contempt to many and of admiration and understanding to a few, were the expression of a singularly candid nature. Sharpness, dishonesty, the advantage taken by the strong over

the weak, the helplessness of the meek, these things oppressed his open and guileless mind. His own faults, a tendency to obstinacy and to insist on his own way, were tempered by this great pity and consideration for weakness. Nor were the genial faults harshly judged by him, though, as a man of fastidious and cleanly life he deplored self-indulgence. What he hated were the sneaking and furtive sins, which, being committed against one, left one not only injured but outraged, and more galling still, outwitted.

He was a countryman with more than an intuitive understanding of the mental attitude of the country people, the conditions of life and habit which produce such an attitude, and while in worldly matters any young man from college could have taught him wisdom, he had, nevertheless, a keen eye for character. His blue eyes were shadowed by shaggy eyebrows which gave the general expression of rough-edged good-humour, but when the blue eyes were raised and fixed on an impostor their sagacious shrewdness was invariably disconcerting. "What's he looking at me for?" would be the uneasy mental question. On the other hand he had a manner so cordial that the feeble and clouded found relief even in his physical presence.

"When that good man gets a grip of your hand the devil can't come nigh you," said

a poor drunkard whom Mr. Paul had befriended.

" What I likes about Mr. Paul is that he can laugh. None of your ' Well, my good man,' about him. Gives you back as good as he gets, too," said the Wiat blacksmith.

It was this enjoyment of character which gave Mr. Paul occasional reservations, for when some more proper brother deplored the vagaries in speech and manner of one of the flock, Mr. Paul had uneasiness of mind that he had privately enjoyed this very idiosyncrasy and would have been sorry to see that eccentric brother changed to a more formal and exemplary person.

His robust nature disliked anything that savoured of whining. It was his habit to omit from the burial service the words " Man that is born of woman—is full of trouble." " It isn't true," he would say, " or it *ought* not to be true of anyone for whom the rest of the service is true." On the other hand his own mental idiosyncrasies would develop in tender and thoughtful expression. It was his custom to send every year on his own birthday an offering to his mother, a gift truly from the imagination.

He himself did not remember any upbringing better than that of those among whom he lived. He could see, looking back, a flaxen-haired, blue-eyed, mischievous boy of fourteen, with a lumpy

walk and patched corduroys ; a boy with a high treble voice which was often heard in the fields and lanes, who went pace-egging at Easter, ferreting at New Year, garlanding on May-day and who burnt the guy with fireworks at four a penny on the fifth of November ; a boy who helped with the horses and washed under the pump, restricting that duty in cold weather, who climbed trees bird's-nesting and owned a little trolley, who won a prize for reading and who, when strangers appeared at the village school, was called up to recite.

With the eye of a man brought up in the country Mr. Paul noticed where work was going on ; the brown streaks of ploughing which lay like bands on the green fallow-earth ; the ditches half-cleared, with heaps of black rich earth beside them.

The country, to one coming straight to its larger spaces from the town, appears at first glance to be empty save for grazing cattle. The town-dweller seems to have the lanes to himself. But as his eyes become accustomed to the width of the fields and his senses become quickened by the silence, he will become aware that there are people everywhere—the solitariness of their occupation making them appear almost a part of field or hedgerow. But the countryman discerns signs of occupation everywhere. He knows that

a heap of decaying leaves in the lane may mean a motionless figure on the field side of the hedge, resting with as great a sense of luxury as the beasts and as aware of movement around him as the watching and hidden birds.

Mr. Paul was treading familiar lanes with the enjoyment of a boy. As he came near the village he passed men returning from work to their homes. The village straggled in a long line following the course of a diminutive and shallow river. Mr. Paul was going, as was his custom every week, to have tea with one of the members of the chapel, and on this particular evening he was to be the guest of the village cobbler and shoemaker whose wooden shed was at the entrance to one of the three roads which ran through the village.

Chapter 4

HENRY JENNET had been the shoemaker in Wiat long before Mr. Paul had been appointed to the charge there. He was, moreover, the oldest member of the community. He had a tarred wooden shed at the end of the village for his workshop. Some cards of boot-protectors and buttons lay on a sloping window-board and some strips of leather hung in the doorway. Within were his bench, his tools and a rough counter.

He lived in the adjoining cottage with his daughter, a spare, hardworking woman of thirty-three, an exemplary daughter whose one grievance against her father was that he *would* pray in public for his only son, who had left home and drifted away from their sight ten years before. Not that she grudged the place the boy held in their father's affections. She sorrowed as heavily as he. But she would rather have suffered in private. It seemed to keep them always before the eyes of the neighbours. She would have welcomed him back even in rags and disgrace, in which condition she expected him certainly to return, but she would not, like her father, have run to meet

him. She would have dragged him quickly inside the door lest the neighbours should see him before he was washed. There was little likelihood of such a tax on her respectability occurring, however, eagerly though she would have welcomed him home. She thought of him as "young and lively," and every year the home with her father grew quieter and quieter. It had been taken for granted by everybody that she would never marry, though everyone agreed that she would make a good steady wife for a middle-aged man, too serious to take the fancy of a young fellow. So she had grown accustomed to her quiet lot, but remembered wistfully that her brother had been lively and played the flute in the evenings. She remembered the glow of gratification which had rested on her father's face, when, with eyes shut, mouth smiling, and head nodding time to the music, he had listened to her brother playing "Lead, Kindly Light," or "At even ere the sun was set," upon his flute on Sunday evenings. It seemed to him a gracious thing to hear upon the lips of his only son.

But the youth had gone to a near seaport town and had gradually ceased to write home. From inquiries it seemed all too probable that he had fallen into bad company and loose ways, but he had been out of sight now for ten years—years which had been passed by both in waiting for

his return. At first there had been anxiety in the waiting. It seemed hard to go to bed at night and lock the door. Then quietness had come to the sorrow which was to be henceforth the good man's companion. Once or twice the depth and intensity of his grief had become visible to the most casual. On one occasion his lenient judgment upon a " hard case " in the neighbourhood had provoked the comment of the gossips.

" Well, if that's all that people who professes to be so good says about such things I don't wonder they gets done," said Mrs. Huniset, implying by her tone that people who judged so were themselves no better than they should be. For the first time a feeling akin to anger seemed to transform Jennet's patient face.

" Somewhere in the world I've a lad of my own—a prodigal. I never see a man in ragged clothes without asking myself: ' Is it Robert come home at last ? ' Maybe this very night *my* lad may be wanting a friend. Maybe he's done wrong and wants someone to lend him a hand. If only I knew that someone would be kind to my poor lad and see that he means to be better, how this old heart would thank God. I cannot see a man doing wrong and setting out to the far country without thinking, Suppose it was Robert!"

On another occasion—it was a week-evening meeting—the preacher began to read the story

of the prodigal. The congregation had been so accustomed to hear Henry Jennet pray for the prodigal that there was an unconscious turning toward his seat to see how he was affected.

Jennet sat with both square fists like mallets resting on the book-board in front of him, his stout, short body, leaning forward and his feet planted on the floor. But it was not his attitude which showed how profoundly he was moved, rather his great stillness. Every part of him, body and mind alike, seemed absorbed and aware: like a man to whom a long puzzling problem has been made clear; like a man whose own tale is being told again in simple and moving words.

There is nothing which has so immediately softening an effect upon simple people as the sight of a real sorrow patiently suffered, or that of a man, in all other matters morally far above them, enduring heavily and with difficulty a calamity which might have happened easily to themselves, and Jennet was never more influential than when he sat, unseeing of those around him, unhearing of every other thing than the tale of the son who was lost and found and the father who went to meet him. One heavy tear fell on his book. He sighed, wiped it patiently away, took up his large spectacles quietly and looked for the hymn, unaware that every other member of the small gathering knew more now of the sorrow of a

father for a wayward son than twenty readings of Scripture could impress upon them. His sorrow had been his quiet habitual companion. He did not know that in this strange way his whole inner life for the last ten years had become visible and that he had gained an understanding in hearts hitherto indifferent to him.

With the simplicity of the unworldly, Jennet had christened his baby-girl " Ruby," since he read " Who can find a virtuous woman. Is not her price above rubies ? " and the plain, dutiful, middle-aged woman found an unusual satisfaction in her unsuitable name. It seemed to be a possession of her own, like white hands or small feet. At this one point she joined on to a world which was neither hard-working nor commonplace, but purely ornamental.

Ruby had spent the morning cleaning the parlour and baking tea-cakes, and the afternoon in preparing for their visitor. Mr. Paul's visit, which happened every third week (for there were only two other houses in the village which were considered suitable by the community to ask the minister to tea), was another of her links with a larger world. For Mr. Paul was not like other ministers, who had kept themselves on a lofty level and been superfine in their eating, as if to show the difference between an educated man and those into whose company the exigencies of

gospel-preaching might plunge him. But he would talk of matters in the country, would praise her tea-cakes, and more important, eat them, and leave behind him such an atmosphere of kind goodwill that the decent dutiful woman warmed herself by this flame until his next visit came round. It was another difference in the narrow life of the village, in whose active gossip and affairs she took no part, feeling herself to be a possible object for ridicule as an "old maid" and one of a family with a son gone wrong. Mr. Paul, on the other hand, with his genial eyes, did not seem to be aware of her homeliness, and if any feeling lodged in his heart touching their private sorrow, it was certainly not of criticism but of compassion.

Chapter 5

"WELL, Miss Jennet, what a lovely evening and what a nice fire!" said Mr. Paul, taking off his overcoat and hanging his white silk muffler on the hat-stand. Above the hat-stand was a stuffed weasel fastened against the wall, which was covered with glazed tiled paper of a pinkish yellow colour. The smell of toasting tea-cakes came hospitably from the kitchen with Ruby herself.

"It's comfortable to see a fire in the evenings, I always think," said Ruby, standing awkward and pleased in the narrow parlour-door, her best black satin bodice giving an air of festivity to her person, while a white apron showed her prudence.

" Good evening, Sir ! " called Jennet from the door of the cobbler's shop. " I'll not be a minute. I'll be in as soon as I've washed me. Sit you down and warm yourself," and he disappeared into the kitchen.

" Yes, sit down and warm yourself, Mr. Paul," repeated Ruby, having got her cue, pulling the arm-chair nearer to the fire, hauling up from its slippery descent a crochet antimacassar which she had washed and ironed that very morning. Mr. Paul sat down and spread his hands toward the fire, when a knock at the door relieved Ruby of her awkwardness by giving her something to do. The front door was opened.

" Is your father in, Ruby ? " said a man's voice in the passage.

" Is that you, Sam ? " called Jennet, from the back, emerging from the kitchen with one arm in the sleeve of his best black coat.

" I've put your boots on the end of the counter there. They'll not bear much more doing to them. I shall be sorry to say good-bye to my old friends, but I'm afraid it must be a long parting this time."

The man laughed a little constrainedly.

" They must do a bit longer, anyhow," he said. " Good night, Henry ! Good night, Ruby ! "

" It's Sam Perry," explained Ruby to Mr. Paul. " But you'll want your tea after your long walk.

Are you ready, father ? I'll make the tea. Everything's ready."

" D'ye know, Mr. Paul," said Jennet, coming into the room. " I heard the most astonishing thing about Sam Perry the other day that I ever heard in my life. I'd forgotten it for the minute till I saw him just now. I really cannot bring my mind to think it's true. I really cannot."

" What was it, Henry ? " asked Mr. Paul.

" Well, you know. I hardly liked to repeat it in case it wasn't true. It's a most remarkable thing."

" Now, you'll really *have* to tell me after that, Henry," said Mr. Paul. " I don't think my curiosity will hold out."

" It doesn't matter mentioning it to Mr. Paul," said Ruby, coming in from the kitchen with the tea-pot and hot cakes.

" Well, it does seem such an extraordinary thing," said Jennet. " Pull your chair up, Mr. Paul, and have a tea-cake while it's hot. Well, this is what it was. I did hear that that Turner—you know him, Mr. Paul, he keeps the baker's shop, he doesn't belong to our people—I heard it said about the village that he'd made a bet in a public-house that he'd ruin Perry's business in two years."

" No, no ! Surely not," said Mr. Paul reassuringly.

" It's *said* so," replied Jennet seriously. " He's

not a man that's given to drink, or I should have put it down to that. It was old Richard who came and told *me*. He seemed upset and asked me to stand by Perry. 'Well, I hope there'll be no occasion,' I said, and then he told me how it was. They was having a glass of bitter at the Buck i' th' Vine. I told him that was what began it. If they'd been doing their work as they ought to have been doing, they'd never have met Turner. But, however, there they were, and Turner came in and then Jerry Greenwood put him out about something. He's short-tempered is Turner, and they got to taunting a bit and Perry came into it somehow, though he wasn't there, by what I could make out, and then they made this bet that Turner could ruin Perry in two years. Jerry Greenwood said he couldn't, you see. That made Turner angry. Did you ever hear of such a thing ? "

" He hasn't done it yet, of course," said Mr. Paul.

" But he's bought a market bus," said Jennet. " Yes, he has indeed. I saw it only this morning. That's why I'm upset about it. "

" It's inconceivable," said Mr. Paul, visibly disturbed.

" I wouldn't have taken any notice if it hadn't been for that," said Jennet. " I'd have said they was neither of them in their right minds just then. But I felt very queer when I saw that bus in

Turner's yard this morning. He's what you might call very persistent, is Turner, and poor Sam, he's hampered at home and he's easy-going. The best intentions in the world has poor Sam—the very best," concluded Jennet.

"Oh, that poor woman!" exclaimed Ruby. "I went into the house the other day to see about sending a parcel to market, and there was the washing all over the floor and she kneeling in the middle saying her prayers out of a hymn-book. Jessie had done what she could before she went to school, but it's discouraging for a child. She doesn't know where to start when things get as bad as that. I got poor Mary to get up off her knees and help, but she'd forget every now and then. These fits don't last for more than a few days, but, you know, with nine children poor Sam has hard work to keep from beating her. He's never once been known to lay hands on the children in temper, but you know it *is* hard, Mr. Paul, when a man comes home wet through and not a bit of fire nor a dry shirt, and the neighbours gossiping about the doorstep."

"What makes it hardest of all is that the poor woman can't help it," said Jennet, with a spice of indignation. "Why, to hear the way some of those other women talk, that poor wife of Sam Perry's might be downright wicked. She's a nice well-spoken woman when she's all right and she never

does any harm even when she goes queer, but she forgets everything and thinks she's praying, and of course, it *is* trying for a man to have a wife that's worse than useless. You see, you can't talk to her. She can't help it, and she doesn't remember anything about it when she comes out of her fits. Poor Sam! You wouldn't think of going round there when you've finished your tea, would you, Mr. Paul? Sam, he doesn't go to church or chapel,—says he doesn't like to, but he's a great respect for you, Mr. Paul. Perhaps we might find the ins and outs of the bus. Don't hurry now, Mr. Paul! Don't hurry, or else I shall be sorry I spoke. Pass your cup! Ruby, give Mr. Paul another cup of tea."

But Mr. Paul declared he had already had an alderman's feast and could eat and drink no more.

"You really mustn't tempt me with any more tea-cakes, Miss Jennet. I'm afraid I eat too many, they're so excellent," said the good man kindly.

"You can't eat too many or too often in this house," said Jennet heartily.

"You cannot," added Ruby.

"It's more than kind of you," said Mr. Paul. "Now I'm ready when you are, Henry," and the two men issued from the narrow doorway and set off down the village street, while Ruby shut the door after them, put on her apron, which she had taken off for the ceremony of tea, and began to "clear."

Chapter 6

"YOU wouldn't like to take Hepzibah Hewlett on the way, would you, Sir?" asked Jennet; "she lives a bit off the road, but she's always glad of a visit. She's rough, Sir, but she's tasty. Talks worse than she is, and Robert's such a good fellow, he likes to think you'll go and see them. I'll depend we shall find them in if we go."

"Ah, yes! I always enjoy talking to Hepzibah," said Mr. Paul. "I don't know how it is she has such a bad name. She's never anything but kindly-spoken to me," he added innocently.

"No! I don't suppose she is," said Jennet, with a laugh. "It's how you look at things, you see. Most people get what they look for from Hepzibah. Her tongue's been too sharp all her life," he went on meditatively. "It's lucky she's got a good man like Robert. It isn't everybody that understands her. But *I* like her. You've only got to get used to her way of speaking about things. I have many a laugh at her sayings with Ruby."

Hepzibah Hewlett was the notorious rough-speaker of the village and perhaps the cleverest

woman in all Wiat. She was also the most avoided. Her sharp tongue had, as Jennet said, made any encounter with her to be dreaded—more especially as it was always of the greatest publicity. For Hepzibah cared for no man and her tongue spoke the rankest truth of man and woman alike. Yet underneath the lashing of her speech, which drove away acquaintance, there lurked a very real desire to attract affection, and Henry Jennet was accustomed to say that he never felt nearer crying in his life at the sight of Hepzibah's own tears when no neighbour would come near her to wash the kitchen floor at a time when she lay ill and helpless with a broken leg.

There was plenty to "take hold of" in the imperfect life of Hepzibah. She was unruly as well as violent in speech. She was careless in her dress as in her talk, and her house was often dirty—"oftener than not" the other women said. Irascible, yet warmly affectionate, it had been her good fortune to attract one of those equable, quiet men described as "steady" by everyone. Robert knew what domestic comfort he owed to his wife's management. For, quiet in temper, he was also tranquil in ambition and his wages were never raised for his asking. It was Hepzibah's boast (outside Robert's hearing) that she had never known him lose his temper in all their married

life ; not even with her mother, " which is more," she would add with candour, " than I have."

" It ain't no good talking to him," she would say to Ruby Jennet, who was half-fascinated, half-scandalised by Hepzibah's freedom of speech. " Do you know what he does when I starts scolding him ? Why, he begins to sing and he sings till I stops. ' What's the good of talking to *you* ? ' I says. ' It ain't no good talking, I may as well stop.'

" ' Well now ! ' he'll say. ' What's the good of upsetting yourself like that ? What better are you for it I should like to know ! '

" ' Oh, go on ! ' I says. ' It ain't no good talking.' I've never got him to answer back since we was married, and we've been married eighteen years. Eighteen years day before Christmas and I've never heard him say a bad word."

As Jennet entered with Mr. Paul it was evident that there had been a domestic wrangle. It was spent, however, for Hepzibah, though flushed, was again in temper, and Robert was puffing at a clay pipe with a twinkle of amusement in his eyes.

He rose clumsily as his visitors appeared at the doorway and greeted them with the embarrassment of a shy man caught before he could escape. The last heat of Hepzibah's temper disappeared before the honour of Mr. Paul's visit and she welcomed him with respect and cordiality. From

the alacrity with which a small black-haired urchin of ten disappeared from the room, and the presence in his mother's hands of a pair of trousers torn in a lamentable manner, the cause of the outcry was apparent. Hepzibah continued the interrupted lament, but with some rueful enjoyment now that her son was out of earshot.

" 'Charlie,' I says, 'Don't you go a bird's-nesting on the way to school, now will you ?' "

" 'No, I won't, Mam,' " says he, and here he comes in just now holding up his trousers with both hands in his pockets. 'You've never torn your trousers again, have you ?' I says. 'Turn you round and let me see what you've been doing."

" 'I just looked into a bird's nest,' " says he. Just *looked* into it, he did. I'll be bound he did, and his father he sits and laughs, and that's all I gets," declared Hepzibah.

' Is it all you *give*, Hepzibah ? " asked Mr. Paul slyly.

Hepzibah laughed frankly. She was never averse to a " poke " as she called it.

" I know how to make the pains come on," she said mysteriously.

" Now then ! Now then ! " said Robert, taking his pipe out of his mouth.

" *I* knows ! " repeated Hepzibah. " Now you surely ain't going to begin a-singing before Mr.

Paul and Henry, are you ? You ain't got so much of a voice as all that ! "

Here Jennet, who had been abnormally serious, so as to give the impression that he had noticed nothing unusual in the atmosphere, gave a chuckle. Hepzibah glanced at him as at an ally.

" Here, you get out ! " she exclaimed suddenly, catching sight of the dog, which had taken the opportunity of creeping into the fender. " We don't want no lodgers there."

Jennet laughed again. His simple, rather slow-moving mind greatly enjoyed quickness of retort and suggestion in another. He really did find Hepzibah tasty.

" You haven't told us yet," he suggested, sticking to the point.

" No, I haven't, but I will," declared Hepzibah, looking over at her husband.

" I think I'll just go for a bit of a walk," said Robert. " Pigs wants feeding, I expect."

" Ah ! when I wants to make him jump about," said Hepzibah hurriedly, " I tells him I'm going up to the dancing at the social. ' It ain't no place for a married woman,' he says."

" No, it ain't," interrupted Robert.

" What did I tell you ? " said Hepzibah, delighted. " Didn't I tell you it made the pains come on ? Always the same. ' I'm off,' I says. ' No you ain't,' he says. ' Tain't no place for a

married woman,' he says. 'A married woman ain't no business there.' Christmas morning, Mr. Paul," she broke off, turning to her visitor, whose face wore a look of unconcealed amusement, " Here I wakes up first and I gives Robert a poke. 'Do you know what day it is?' I says. 'Christmas, ain't it?' he says, turning over as silly as could be and going to sleep again. 'It's our wedding-day,' I says. 'Er,' he grunts. 'Ain't you going to say "dear" to me?' I says, and then he turns over again and says, 'Ain't you cost me enough already?' he says. 'Seems to me you've been dear enough.' "

" Surely nothing's too dear to pay for Hepzibah, Robert," said Mr. Paul mischievously. Robert winked and drew at his pipe. Jennet laughed.

" He says he paid sixpence too much," said Hepzibah.

" So I did," interposed Robert. " I never heard of anybody else paying sixpence for a stamp. Sixpence was what *I* paid, sixpence too much! I wur done. No doubt about it. They did me over that stamp."

He settled back in his chair with an air of provocation. One always expected, when one visited the Hewletts, that Hepzibah would do all the talking, speaking with as great freedom about her husband as if he were not present. Robert was difficult of speech as Hepzibah was fluent

and ready. Only at some unusually outrageous speech would he take the pipe from his mouth and open his lips to speak. He seldom got further that the first ejaculation, "Now then! Now then!" before Hepzibah had taken up her story again.

"Anyways, Mr. Paul," went on Hepzibah's facile tongue, "if he *was* done, he won't never go to church unless I ties his tie for him."

"Ah, I thought you got it back somehow, Hepzibah," said Mr. Paul.

"Won't stir out without it," declared Hepzibah. "I spoilt him when we was first married. Used to offer to do it for him, I did, and now he won't go to church without."

"I always suspected there was a bit of a dandy about Robert," said Mr. Paul.

Robert grinned.

"Very particular how he goes, I can assure you," said Hepzibah. "But you should see him when I goes to bed at night. (I haves pity on him and leaves him the last half-hour in peace). He gets the paper, and you can talk to him for ever, but he won't hear you."

"Yes, I do hear," interrupted Robert.

"Well, you don't say nothing, then," retorted Hepzibah. "He sits by the fire reading his paper and blowing his bacca just as if he was rolling in money. I says to him sometimes, 'I expect

you feels yourself a millionaire when I'm gone to bed.' He's glad to see the back of me, you can lay your life."

"I can do with your face sometimes," said Robert, placidly.

"Never," said Hepzibah.

"You ain't like Hepzibah in the Bible, yet," said Jennet.

"It means 'forsaken,'" explained Mr. Paul.

"No, I aren't forsaken," said the rough woman, with simple seriousness; then unable to resist the pleasure of keeping her audience, she went on:

"Do you know, Mr. Paul, I was standing at the gate the other evening, late on it was, and a cheeky individual come by, selling linoleum or something of that. I looks at him and he looks at me. 'Pon my bob, Ma'am,' he says. 'You *do* look fat and well.' Yes, he did. 'Pon my bob, Ma'am, you *do* look fat and well!' 'Well, if I do,' I says, 'it's better than all skin and grief, ain't it?' They always used to call me figure of eight in service. All top and bottom and no middle, they used to say I was."

Here Jennet, who had been trying with contortions of his face to decipher the time on a clock which stood on its head on the mantelpiece, rose and said:

"I'm afraid if that clock's right, Mr. Paul, we ought to be going on."

"Perhaps it's wrong if it's standing on its head," said Mr. Paul, rising, however, with Jennet.

"He won't go right way up," explained Hepzibah. "'Oh, very well,' I says, 'go wrong way up if you likes it better. You ain't going to make me buy a new one, no, that you ain't,' and he goes all right on his head," added Hepzibah in triumph.

"When are we going to see you at the meeting?" asked Jennet, shaking hands. "It's a great privilege to hear Mr. Paul."

"No, I ain't coming," said Hepzibah. "Last time I went it upsetted the weather. Rained for a week it did, and I had a fortnight's washing to do that week. I ain't going no more."

As the two visitors said good-bye, laughing, the black-haired imp, who had taken courage at the sound of good humour prevailing, appeared again from some hiding place known to himself.

"Mam!" he called, "Mam! This cheese he don't fit my bread!"

Mr. Paul and Jennet laughed.

"Charlie's as sharp as his mother," said Mr. Paul, and as they left the house behind them they heard Hepzibah's answer before the door slammed.

"Well, you take and round the corners, then."

Chapter 7

SAM PERRY, who was the carrier for the village of Wiat and district, was at this time a man of about forty years of age. He had been an ostler in his youth, as Mrs. Huniset had said, but he had lived in the neighbourhood of Wiat for twenty years.

What there is about horses which bestows on those who look after them an air of unmistakeable similarity it is impossible to say, but no one could look at Perry and be at a loss about his occupation. His stiff knees, the slight roll as he walked, his clean-shaven face and narrow lips, the check suit and bowler hat a little small in the brim, all proclaimed the man who was of the fraternity of the stable. He had married his master's daughter, but the marriage was a disaster in its later years. The poor woman's brains, never robust, became weaker, until there were days when she seemed unconscious of her surroundings altogether and would spend hours in a vague and querulous melancholy which was none the

less a catastrophe in her home that it was none of her fault.

She was a pale, refined-looking woman, with pleasant manners and an excellent way of speech. It was difficult to believe that she had these aberrations. There was nothing violent about them. She would become quiet and vague and then a little distracted and finally sink into a gentle and tearful melancholy. In this mood she would spend hours on her knees at the exercise she knew of as praying, but which was really a cessation of her brain's activity, a retreat into a confused emotion of satisfaction that the Eternal Presence took notice of her thus and called her to rest within it.

Though it was no one's fault exactly, it was, as Ruby Jennet said, "hard on Perry," to come home on a bitter wet night and find neither food nor change of clothing. He spent more and more time at the village inn. At first he would take his wife's place to the children as best he could, but the peeping and prying of women like Mary Huniset, who would appear at the door on some fair-seeming errand or inquiry, but whose real business was perfectly understood by the unfortunate man, drove him to be more and more away from his home during the time of his wife's lapses, and as his eldest girl grew big enough to leave school Perry had

formed the habit of coming home only to sleep when there was, as John Fryatt put it, " trouble in the house."

Perry's market-bus was an institution, much as the blacksmith's forge was, and as such had never been questioned. A man like Bill Turner, who had started a business within the last few years, a thing anyone could do, was open to criticism. But Perry's bus was of the same standing as the cricket-match and the horse fair. Perry's bus had run for twenty years, and if Wiat church steeple had fallen it would have caused hardly more sensation than if Sam Perry had not appeared at the market-inn at nine o'clock every Thursday and Saturday morning, and been encountered at stated times on the road between the village and the station every day of the week.

As Mr. Paul and Henry Jennet approached the end of the long village street, Sam Perry's house, with its stables and yard, came into sight in a depression where the street again resumed its interrupted business of being a country road. In front of Perry's house the farmers' gigs would cease to move circumspectly, and the market cobs would pick up their pace.

It was a plain unornamented building with a garden of serviceable gooseberry bushes and a

crooked apple-tree, from whose bent limbs dangled a broken swing. A pond covered with green weed lay inside the gate and a large ash-tree drooped over a shed raised from the ground on wrought stones shaped like toad-stools. A child's wheelbarrow and stool and a flat block with little heaps of sand, pebbles, leaves and seeds, where children had been playing shop, littered the brick path to the door. Two girls with hard red cheeks and stout legs were climbing over the gate to chase a heavy old bull-dog, who, with laborious panting, and dragging after him a broken chain, made good his escape under the lower part of the gate. The children raced after the dog with cries, he looking over his shoulder to keep them in sight, the chain bouncing on the ground until it caught in a projecting root. The girls fell upon it in triumph, and the dog, its eyes starting in its effort to get free, was dragged victoriously back to the yard. As they came near a boy of ten ran out calling : " Sis ! Sis ! " but catching sight of Mr. Paul, retreated instantly.

" What is it ? " called back an untidy girl of fifteen, who just then emerged from the stable with an empty measure. She also caught sight of Mr. Paul, and her hand first threw back her hair from her forehead and

then fumbled to untie the string of her sack-apron.

"Never mind! Never mind, Jessie," said Mr. Paul, kindly. "We shouldn't take people by surprise like this. Is father in?"

"Yes, I think so, Sir," said Jessie, and then gave an admonitory "Go on in!" to the two girls who stood staring. The girls dragged the bull-dog to kennel and fastened him up, then with loud giggles raced to the swing.

"Will you come in, Sir?" said the elder girl, and preceded the visitors into the house.

At this hour there was nothing in the interior of the living room to suggest anything unusual in the family. It was the usual kitchen of the country, only a little larger, for Perry's house had once been an inn, and even yet the bench which was fastened to the wall remained with its suggestions of rows of seated men, tankards and songs on Saturday night. The room was neither more nor less untidy than any other house-place in the village. The remains of a meal (which Jessie began hastily to clear away) were on the table, and a heap of dirty clothes piled on the copper ready for the morning's wash was visible through the open door of the scullery. As Jessie retreated to the inner room with as many dirty tea-things as she could carry, Mrs. Perry rose quickly and shut the kitchen door,

then straightened the patch-work cushions in the wooden easy-chair for Mr. Paul. Jennet took a chair inside the door, nodding his head paternally now and then to the children outside in the yard.

Sam Perry, who was seated at the round table smoking a clay pipe, made a movement as if to escape when his visitors entered; he pocketed his pipe and shook hands sufficiently amiably. Jennet, who, in the visit to the Hewletts, had, as it were, placed himself as a buffer between Mr. Paul's sensibilities as a gentleman and Hepzibah's possible licence of speech, in this visit effaced himself in the belief that here was a moral dilemma with which Mr. Paul was more competent to deal.

Mr. Paul's nature was too open and his understanding of simple people too intimate, to allow him any subterfuge when he had a definite matter before him. He knew how irritating to inarticulate people is the manner which converses of everything but the object of the visit, and at the moment of leaving throws out an apparently innocent inquiry which deceives no one and leaves a feeling of annoyed reflection, "So *that's* what he came for!" So the good man at once addressed his question straight to Perry with such evident sympathy that offence was impossible.

" I'm sorry to hear, Sam, about this new difficulty which is being talked of in connection with your business."

" Bill Turner ? " asked Sam laconically.

" Oh ! it is a wicked, underhand thing to do ! " broke in Mrs. Perry, who had remained standing, her hands resting on the table in front of her. " I tremble for the judgment of God upon such wickedness."

" You must feel it hard, I'm sure, Mrs. Perry," said Mr. Paul soothingly.

" Sit down, Mrs. Perry," said Jennet, rising from his chair. " Here are we all sitting comfortably and you standing up. Sit down and let us see you comfortable. Now I declare, Ruby had a sitting of Buff Orpingtons to send to you and I came right away and forgot about it. I don't know what she'll say to me, I'm sure ! "

Mrs. Perry having been drawn aside to a discussion on the respective merits of Buff Orpingtons and Houdans as mothers of families, Sam observed to Mr. Paul.

" He ain't done it yet, Sir ! "

" No ! he certainly hasn't," assented Mr. Paul. " How do you feel about the business itself, Sam ? Have you been doing pretty well ? You feel fairly confident ? "

" I'm all right, Sir," was Sam's laconic reply,

but it was evident that this was not the carrier's whole mind on the subject.

"Business is good?" prompted Mr. Paul. "I always thought there was a fair business to be done between Creighton and Wold, but I imagine that the station at Wiston interferes with the trade on the London road."

"It have, Sir," returned Sam. "There's no trade on that side, not enough to pay for a feed of corn a round. Twenty years ago you couldn't have beat that road for carrying, but it's gone worse and going worse every day."

"And Wold? Is that more promising?" asked Mr. Paul.

Sam hesitated and pronounced his definite conviction.

"There ain't enough for two, Sir! If he begins (and he's bought a bus, I hears, already), it'll be a fight, Sir. One of us has got to go. There ain't enough for two."

Mr. Paul's blue eyes became shadowed.

"You think it must be that, Sam? There isn't enough for you to work side by side?"

"Positive, Sir! I ought to know if anybody ought. I've been on these roads very near twenty years. There's enough to last my lifetime, and it's pretty hard that it shouldn't, seems to me."

"I hope it will, indeed, Sam. Perhaps Turner

will see for himself that there isn't much to be made out of it. I should hardly think he's the man to keep on at a failing cause."

" Ain't the man to give up a notion either, as I can see," said Sam. " It's a bet, too,—a new hat it wur, I believe," he added, as though he appreciated the size of the wager in contrast to the importance of the struggle. " He've got religion on his side, too, Sir, if that's anything," he continued, with an expression half bitter, half mischievous, as if he waited to see how it would take Mr. Paul.

" Come now, Sam," protested Mr. Paul, with a smile nevertheless.

" Drunken, good-for-nothing sinner," went on Sam, with melancholy bitterness. " Perhaps he's right. *I* dunno."

" Ah well, Sam," said Mr. Paul. " If we find it so hard a thing to be judged unjustly, let us be careful that we ourselves don't hurt anyone else in the same way."

These allusions, which Mr. Paul had no great difficulty in understanding, referred to a long-standing opposition in the mind of the village between Bill Turner and Sam Perry, in which the holder of the cap so to speak, was a local evangelist, known familiarly to the less respectful of the community as " old Crompton." Perhaps the tartness of Turner's answers to the men drinking at

the Buck i' th' Vine parlour had the flavour of this bitterness within it. It would be difficult otherwise to explain the flashing out of hatred with such suddenness and to such determined purpose.

The evangelist Crompton was one of those ignorant, well-intentioned men of sober life who think that all goodness is comprised in conformity to certain definite matters, and all badness in their omission, and since Perry certainly left undone all the former, and added to the latter the open habit of smoking and drinking, his position as a sinner was clear. The meeting of Crompton and Perry in the village street was like the flaunting of a flag on the sides of open virtue and open sin. Serious sadness was visible even in the walk and expression of Crompton, who conveyed by the gravity of his salute a marked reproof to Perry. He, leaning on his fly-wheel, would return the greeting with an offensive grin or wink or an offended and defiant stare, ostentatiously pulling his tobacco-pouch from his pocket, if he were not already smoking, and filling his pipe, with eyes looking for the shudder of his virtuous neighbour. Since neither spoke to the other (Perry taking care to keep out of the way of the lecture of which he deemed Crompton's conversation to consist), each stiffened in his opinion, one believing the other to be gospel-hardened and boastful of an

evil life, the other believing his judge to be a sneak and a toady and no manner of judge for him.

Turner, on the other hand, as a strict upholder of morals, presented to the world the spectacle of a man ruling his household in righteousness, and though he was little liked by the village, no one denied the evidence of their eyes as to his well-ordered affairs. Turner never swore, where Perry's speech was uncontrolled and free. Turner was heavily severe in matters of morals, whereas Perry had been known to speak in a friendly way to the moral outcast of the village—a slack-mouthed, slatternly girl who had already had and abandoned three husbands and who went about quite content to show a wide and vacant grin at the lewd jests flung to her by the young men in the fields.

It was a long-standing opposition, though it had slipped into the background, and Mr. Paul remembered the careless speech of Crompton's which, repeated officiously to Perry, had smouldered and now blazed.

"You've thought it carefully over, I suppose, Sam?" asked Mr. Paul.

"Well, I ain't going to give up my own trade, if that's what you mean, Sir," answered Sam, a little sullenly.

"Well, Sam, I should think if you go about

your own trade, as you say, punctually and regularly, not fail your customers and avoid as much as possible the stirring up of strife by encouraging any talk about rivalry, I feel sure Turner must in time desist, even if he means seriously now, which I doubt rather."

"*I* don't, Sir," said Sam.

"Well, well, let us not see evil before it has actually been done," replied Mr. Paul. "*I*, at any rate, shall stick to the old firm. You may look for me on Wednesday night as usual, and I believe if we can avoid talking in the village we shall do a great deal to lessen the difficulty."

While Mr. Paul was taking leave of Mrs. Perry, Jennet, with his hand on Perry's shoulder, was talking in an undertone. Sam's hurried nods and Jennet's earnest whisperings and the final drawing apart of the two men as Mr. Paul turned towards them, suggested an expostulation on the part of Jennet, to which Perry made haste to assent lest Mr. Paul should hear, and it was not until the two visitors had gone a little way along the road in silence that Jennet said thoughtfully :

"You see, Sir, Perry has his weakness. I daresay it would be different if that poor wife of his was different, but he *does* have a glass once too often, and last week he didn't turn up to take Miss Lydiate to the station. She was offended and says she'll never employ Perry again. That's

what's going to worry Sam most. He's been known to fail sometimes, and that's where Turner's going to pick up custom."

"Ay, I'm afraid that's a difficulty," said Mr. Paul.

Chapter 8

THE following week, Mr. Paul, his head thoughtfully bent, was walking on a field-path between Wiat and an adjacent village. The cottage in which he had left the sick man reminded him very acutely of the home in which his own boyhood had been spent and he was thinking of that early time.

With a smile, half-amused, half-ashamed, he remembered the great day when a pink placard had appeared on the overturned root of the felled tree which served as a posting-place for the country news, announcing a revival to be held in a little chapel two miles distant from his home. The idea of grown-up people, possibly a gaffer or two, crying and groaning for their sins, filled the imagination of Enoch and his friends with delight. They would undertake that there should be something to cry about. During the days preceding the revival there was much talking under hedges and behind barns and an epidemic of winks and whistling.

It would be better to wait a night or two to let the crying and groaning get well under way, and then on a certain evening when things were at

their height, the lights would suddenly go out. Enoch was himself to give the signal by scratching his head. But when the time came for the signal, Enoch had seen a vision by which all things in heaven and earth were henceforth to be judged. He had neither groaned nor cried nor thought of his sins. He had received a sudden knowledge of the love of God which filled him with amazement and happiness.

There had been a time later when the sunshine itself seemed full of this love and the whole world seemed stretching out its hands for the message he had to give. But Enoch had lived twenty-five years since then. He knew what all reformers know, that his message of hope was undesired because it was a message of regeneration. He bore no flaming sword, but trudged in country-made boots to an obscure village not even important enough to be put on the railway line, and ministered to a handful of poor folk as groping and ignorant as the sick man he had just left.

Raising his head he saw walking in front of him William Jacks, a clever young carpenter of the village. With a few more steps he overtook him.

There was a great silence over the country. The field itself was very quiet, not dark, but yet not light. One large elm-tree in the corner shivered now and then, though there was no wind. The full moon travelled along the edge of the

hill stealthily, intent on its own affairs. It seemed to increase the silence. It was an evening and an hour which would impress its quiet on the most talkative. Two countrymen, walking thus in solitude through the spaces of that wide field, and meeting, would have fallen into step and continued their walk together in silence, but Mr. Paul, being a person from another sphere, must be conversed with, and besides, William was full of his own thoughts which now needed a confidant.

"Now, Mr. Paul, what's *your* opinion of this trick of Bill Turner's that he's playing on Sam Perry? A dirty, low thing to do *I* call it. Perry isn't much of a man, but I'm beggared if Turner isn't a worse. *Pitiful* it is! Said he'd ruin Perry in two years by all accounts," said William, with whole-hearted indignation.

"Ah, no! no! William," replied Mr. Paul. "Men say things in the heat of the moment which they don't really mean. Turner is a man of rather a narrow brain, I'm afraid, but I can hardly think he would do anything to deliberately injure another man."

"Oh, Mr. Paul, you're too good," said William, shaking his head, "you don't keep your eyes open."

"Perhaps other people keep them open too much and see things that aren't there, William!" said Mr. Paul.

"I don't know about that, Mr. Paul! You have to keep your eyes open in this world."

"So long as they don't look at anything else but this world," said Mr. Paul gently.

"Well, you know, Mr. Paul," said William a little consciously—"you *must* live!"

"No, William, there's not the least necessity!" said Mr. Paul, with a twinkle. "Die and go to Heaven and tell the Lord you can't make an honest living on earth and see what He says about it."

Mr. Paul's reply so tickled the imagination of William that there were few men at field-work in the district who had not heard it within the week. It became a greeting as they went backward and forward to work.

"You must live!" one man would shout to another across the hedge.

"There's not the least necessity," the other would retort, and a third would add, "Die and go to Heaven and tell the Lord about it."

It was this human quality which gave Mr. Paul his sympathy with these people and it was his sincerity and fearless judgment, the habit he had of going to the middle of an affair at once and following his own conclusions, which made the village look to him now for a lead in the new dilemma which had arisen in their affairs. Few doubted on which side his sympathies would be

cast, for his hatred of injustice was well known. A few rejoiced and watched furtively for the effect of his judgment on old Crompton, for the shrewd suspected that there was little enough sympathy between them.

Chapter 9

OLD Betty Betch was one of those happy inhabitants of the country to whom the actual occurrences in the fields, the change and progression of the seasons, and their varying occupations are a perpetual pageant and joy. She lived in a kind of hovel in a hamlet half a mile from the village, called "The Irish," though from what origin or apropos remained a mystery. But if few wants, an easy acceptance of the fruits of the earth, and great intimacy with the wild and domestic animals, reflect anything of the nature of the Irish people, then Betty's home was well-named. Whether the hens and ducks were the real inhabitants or Betty herself seemed immaterial. Betty lived outdoors and the hens inhabited the house as much as Betty.

No one knew whether Betty had been married or not, and she never referred to any other condition of life than her present one. She seemed rather like a child who had been left to grow up as she could, without family or relations, and to have therefore settled down into the state of being perpetually occupied with the business of childhood. She was an eccentric who had the singular

fate of never being scoffed at by children. Her business was in fact identical with theirs. Mushrooming, blackberrying, garlanding, waiting for the post with letters at out-of-the-way corners, selling eggs and garden stuff and gathering the first white violets for wreaths to lay upon graves. All these were Betty's serious occupations in life.

One knew it was Betty Betch at once when one met her in the lane. As she came in sight she was not much larger than a lanky girl and dressed in the same nondescript manner in which she had gone gathering violets in her girlhood. The red on her cheeks was a fixture in spite of advancing old age, and her grey hair was plaited and fastened in a screw over either ear with one long hairpin. She had a light blue eye of extraordinary keenness. Out of doors nothing escaped her. She had the concentration of gaze one notices in sailors, due to the constant searching and peering for small and hidden-away objects and the turning of the eyes on open prospects. She had an enormous reputation as a wise woman in the matter of flowers and plants, a reputation which she disclaimed as much as she enjoyed. She would laugh in her high treble, putting her hands before her mouth, and confide to you her "secret," as she called it. She talked with the odd pauses of one who talks much to herself.

"You see, you must know the month" (im-

pressively) " and where to look for them, and then you're the master—you understand what I mean —the master "—a pause. " It's no good looking, though you look ever so hard, for bell-buttons in November "—a pause—" You won't find 'em "—pause—" Look for bell-buttons in May and then you'll find 'em everywhere."

She spoke in a kind of sing-song whine which recalled unpleasantly at first the whining of a beggar, until one listened to the actual words. She had a habit of drawing a moral from current events, a habit dear to the country person.

" Ah, yes !—my friend had just built a beautiful house for herself "—pause—" But she died "—pause—" and John Williams and his wife have had their house burnt to the ground—and they are still alive—so one stays, you see, and another goes."

She was pleased to be able to show a rarity to anyone who knew it as such. She had discovered for herself the adder's-tongue fern one day and never ceased to regret the time when, not knowing its rarity, she had, as she said " Trodden it under her feet."

" I respect flowers," she would say. " You understand, don't you ? If there's ladies who want a certain kind I gather them. Other times I leaves them alone."

She was of an exceedingly gentle nature. " Wouldn't hurt a fly," the village said. She was

also slatternly in habits and had forgotten how to write, though she could still read with difficulty—"Left school when she was ten, she did, to go to service," said Mrs. Huniset to Miss Lydiate, though what kind of service it could have been that she rendered it would be difficult to decide. Probably, like the reading and writing, she had forgotten it also. Certainly no remnant remained to her of anything learnt in such capacity.

The happiness of her temper was her great gift. With her physical wants reduced to a minimum and with no responsibilities she rejoiced in the sunlight and in her knowledge of the woodland, like the gentle child which she really was.

"How nice the fields do smell with the dew upon them," she would say. "I would *pay* to be allowed to work in the fields."

Mr. Paul had enough left in him of that flaxen-haired boy who had gone nutting and bird's-nesting to enjoy meeting Betty Betch, and as he saw her nimble and tiny figure in front of him the morning after his encounter with William Jacks, he smiled and quickened his pace to overtake her.

"Good morning, Betty," he said, as he reached her, looking down from his height as if to a child. "It's cold this morning,"

Betty started and coloured in confusion, then dropped a curtsey and reddened with pleasure.

"Good morning, Sir," she answered.

"Finger-cold it is this morning, Sir. All the fields was white this morning, Sir—first thing early—I don't know whether you noticed it, Sir—a regular mantle of snow there was. Yes, Sir—it *is* cold this morning."

"You've found something, I see," said Mr. Paul. "Are they morels?"

"*Early*, isn't it, for them?" said Betty with satisfaction. "I said last night, to myself, 'Now the moon's filling there should be morels about'—they grows with the moon and fades with the moon—see, that's how they do; grows when the moon's filling—but when I saw the grass all rimy—I was sure I should find none—but I found all this quantity, Sir—quite a number," and Betty opened a blue checked handkerchief to show her find. "Some days, you see, are pleasant," she began again, "and other days are unpleasant—to-day, now, I had a very pleasant day—very pleasant—what do you think, Sir? I found a penknife—yes, indeed I did—and I also found, Sir—the person to whom the penknife belonged. Such things so seldom fall out—The foreman of Wright's bone works happened to have lost it—and I, Sir, happened to find it!"

"And I happened to come along and hear about it," said Mr. Paul, "so that passed your pleasure on to me, also. How did the hop-picking go last year, Betty?"

" Oh, Sir, most beautiful! I often say, Mr. Paul, I would pay to go hop-picking, instead of being paid for it—as I am—the best time of the year I do believe is September, Sir—or, no, I forgot the time when the cowslips come out and the blue-bells, and later on there are the ragged robins—I can't tell I'm sure which is the best time—and in summer there is hay-making——"

" He has made all things good in their season," said Mr. Paul.

" You know, Sir," said Betty, whose talk came in a torrent when she had anyone to talk to, " I often think—I don't know whether I'm wrong—you see I think these things when I'm by myself— How He must have enjoyed walking about—and seeing how beautiful it all was—the turnip-field of a morning, Sir—what with admiring the dew upon it—and all those little spider-webs that look so beautiful—I was once nearly late for the hop-tying. I am not often late, Sir—it seems such a waste of time to be late—you never can pick up the day you lose in the early morning. Mr. Ridsdale, he always says: ' Betty Betch ? Why Betty Betch'll be here ten minutes before everyone else ! ' But I wasn't that morning, Sir—I wasn't, indeed. I was almost ten minutes behind —and I heard Mr. Ridsdale saying as I came up— ' Betty Betch not here yet ? She must be badly !' I was so confused, though I wasn't so late as some

others—I really felt I must stay half-an-hour at the end of the day to make up—he had expected me—and I had failed him. Little Jessie Perry stayed with me, such a clever little tier—Poor Mary never could manage field-work—always wandering from one thing to another." Betty here paused for a longer time and then, as if having made decision, she began again.

" Sir ! I want to make a suggestion—it is not often I have the chance of seeing anyone who can carry out such things—and of course it would be laughable if *I* did it—but a gentleman who can put things nicely, so that no one could be offended —would it not be possible, now, to tell Mr. Turner how badly a bus is needed *across* the country—between the villages ?—the old people—I do so feel for them—and there need be no disputing at all any more." Betty stopped.

"I wonder if you're right, Betty," said Mr. Paul, struck by the sudden idea. " The old people haven't much money to spend in drives, you know —But we must all try together over this trouble. Do you know whether the bus has actually started ? "

" On market-day—on Thursday it will run for the first time. I am so sorry for Sam Perry—so kind as he is to his children."

" We must all be very careful to avoid rubbing the sore by talking of it too much," said Mr.

Paul. "When the first anger is past it may be possible to reason with Turner. At the moment it seems impossible to turn him from his purpose. He may come to see of himself that there is too little to be gained by persisting in his idea. You turn up here, I think, Betty, so I'll say good-day. I am going to see Henry Jennet before I get back home," and the two separated at the corner of the intersecting lanes.

Chapter 10

MR. PAUL, leaving Betty, turned again into the fields and as he mounted a slope passed by outlying ground of the farmer who employed Robert Hewlett as labourer. It lay on a rounded ridge, and upon its bulging shoulder three men were stooping as they hoed between the rows of early wheat. Their gesture was antique and full of dignity. Their stained and faded corduroys had been coloured by the same force which had greened the boles of the elm trees and darkened the flints by the hedge-side. The slow advance and falling of the hoes had almost the gravity of a rite which the bending heads of the labourers impressed still more upon their work. Robert, at the side of the field, near the path by which Mr. Paul passed, was fastening the head on his hoe. He was sharpening the point of the broken handle, the long stick thrust under his arm and the point protruding. His face was pursed by the effort of sharpening the stick. He used the same clasp-knife with which he would presently cut his bread and cheese. His back was toward Mr. Paul, and the latter advanced with a smile of mischief upon

his face. For Robert's shyness was a proverb. He had been known to spend an hour in the hayloft if he espied any of the gentry come to visit at his house. He started, as Mr. Paul greeted him by name, but being, as it were, on his own ground and really at home, as he never was in the house, he replied with composure to the salutation. Robert had the contented expression of one who has found a confident philosophy of life after long observation and experience. Mr. Paul, observing that the drought must hinder the work, the labourer looked at him as if to take the measure of his sympathy and observed drily :

" I've seen bad weather before, Sir, and I expect I'll see it again. We got over it, you know, before and I daresay we shall this time."

" Ah, you got over it, Robert ! " answered Mr. Paul, falling into his mood. It was this instant ability to perceive his companion's mood, the sympathy which left those who came into contact with him warmed by understanding, which was Mr. Paul's passport into the hearts of the country people.

" Yes, we got over it," asserted Robert once more, ironically, " and I daresay we shall do it again. These young farmers now-a-days, they gets in such a way when there's a wet day or a bit of drought. Why, you'd think there'd never been one before ! We've had bad weather before and

we got over it. *They'll* get over it, too, if they wait. Make a fuss! I've seen it before, I tell them, and they'll see it again, I've no doubt." Robert's slow speech was difficult to start, but under way it went solidly on with a certain mature quality which was helped by its rarity. His philosophy of farm labour was unfolded.

" These lads here, they wants to leave off at a certain time every day. Do you think the weather's going to wait for *you*, I says to them? How are you going to look with half a field of wheat coming up at a time? I says. Nice and silly you'll look when it comes to harvest! Faces when they've to take the tide,—why, it's like a thunderstorm! We shan't want no rain with them faces about, I says. But that's what it is with everybody now. They think it's all a new thing and all done a purpose for them, to spite them or something. 'Come on purpose that thunderstorm, I expect,' I says to young Ben there.

" 'Something like it,' he says.

" 'Why,' I says, 'you don't know *what* you want. Look at me! Two suits of cord and a pair of boots at Christmas, that was my wages when I began working. Tea? A piece of bread toasted brown with boiling water poured over it, that was all the tea *I* ever saw. Had a clean suit Sunday morning to go to church, and my mother

washed the other ready for next Sunday. Fetch all the letters for the farmers we had to before school—two miles there and two miles back, and earn our pair of boots at Christmas. How'd you like *that* ? ' I asks 'em."

" ' Nice and silly you was to do it,' says Ben. ' See me doing of it,' he says.

" ' I shall see a blue moon in the sky first ! ' says I. ' You needn't waste time telling me *that.* I knows very well what you'd do and what you wouldn't. Why, if I'd have given half the impudence you lads gives now, my old father, he'd have cut me asunder—cut me asunder, he would. ' Tain't no use to keep on tap tappin' at 'em ! ' he used to say, ' Cut 'em asunder right off and they won't ne'er forget it ! ' he says. ' Cut 'em asunder. That's how they'll mind next time. Won't want ne'er another thrashing, they won't.' We never did, as I remember," added Robert, with a dry smile. " And all this going round to people's houses to get their tea ! Ain't I got a cup of tea in my own house that I've to go to other people's to get one ? And then there's this messing about interferring with other people's livings. What do you think of it, Mr. Paul, this narking bus affair ? " and Robert, his eloquence swamped by his rising indignation, rammed his hoe savagely on its handle.

" Well, Robert," said Mr. Paul, with a rather

sad smile. " I should say your own say about it. I've see such bad weather before and we got over it. I daresay we shall again. All the weather isn't exhausted in one thunderstorm. We must learn from our past knowledge, and hope the storm will not be very long. We must rest on our experience in other matters besides farming, and be patient."

" I've never had no experience of this sort of dirty work ! " said Robert, giving a trial to his mended hoe and cutting the head of a dandelion into a myriad fragments.

" What ee calling dirty work, eh ? " demanded one of the labourers, who, in their slow progress, had advanced within speaking distance.

He was a lean old man with white hair appearing beneath his slouching hat. The two younger labourers raised themselves and stood leaning on their hoes, but the old man's back remained bent in the position to which it must soon return—with that pathetic economy of movement so often apparent in old field workers. His shrewd little blue eyes looked sideways inquisitively at Mr. Paul and Robert. The young men grinned.

" Why, Bill Turner and Sam Perry," said Robert.

" Thought it might be that," said the old man. " I was there, I wus, when Bill Turner was terrifyin' old Jerry. Sitting there, I wus, as it might be,

and old Bill Turner, I don't know how 'twas—didn't like the look of old Jerry or something—he began a-terrifyin' of him.

"'Tain't right,' says Joe, 'taking away a man's living behind his back!'

"'No, 'tisn't,' says I. 'You never know who might be doing of it and you sleeping quiet.'

"'He won't never take no one's living,' says Jerry. Laughed in his face, he did, old Jerry. Old Jerry, he comes along the other evening.

"'How about it?' says I. 'He won't do it!' says Jerry, 'he ain't got the 'bility.' 'I don't know about the 'bility,' I says, 'but he's got the bus.'

"I says he means to do it if he can, but I ain't going to encourage of him."

The three other men broke into a laugh, young Ben bursting with spasmodic giggling throughout the succeeding conversation.

"Ain't nothing to laugh at," said the old man. "'Tisn't a thing to be encouraged, is it? Well, then, I ain't going to encourage of him. Spiteful! that's what it is! Never heard of nobody in Wiat doing that before. Lifts up things off the ground they do now; plenty of that going on. Left my old 'ammer lying about—mending old gal's chicken-coop I was—put down the old 'ammer for a minute while I doos something else—somebody ups and offs with it; ain't never seen it since.

But I never seen anything spiteful same as this 'ere. I don't know what that young feller's laughing at!" broke off the old man severely. "Seems to laugh at his shadow! Struck comical he'll be one of these days if he keeps on laughing like that." Young Ben gulped and spluttered with a purple face, while the others maintained a perpetual smile. "If Bill Turner wants encouragement don't let him come to me, for I won't encourage him. Terrifyin' people! Messing about!" and the old man wiped his mouth with a hand withered like a winter apple.

"Sad——" began Mr. Paul, but the old man interrupted.

"*Spiteful:* that's what 'tis, Sir. 'Tain't sad. 'Tis spiteful. Ain't been 'ere four years neither, old Bill Turner. Sam Perry he's been here twenty. I remember of his old mare getting stuck in the ditch. Old gal wouldn't help herself out neither. Sam, he comes along. 'I can't get her out,' he says. 'Come along you and help! Brought ropes, he did, and gied em to me arterwards. Got em up in my old shed. We got her out all right, the old gal, but er wouldn't never do nothing after. Had to be slaughtered down in the end—never did no more work. *That's* fifteen years ago. Been here twenty years has Sam Perry to Bill Turner's four. Kicking up a dust same as this. Spiteful feller!"

"It's tiresome work, isn't it, Joey, going over the furrows hoeing the weeds!" said Mr. Paul. "But there doesn't seem any other way of getting rid of them except hoeing them one by one. There's a good deal of weeding to be done in our lives before the Lord of the harvest finds us good sound grain."

"Won't find much of a substance in old Bill," rejoined Joey unperturbed. "Kicking up a dust."

Mr. Paul's smile, which had been hovering round the corners of his mouth, here broke down. He laughed with the greatest enjoyment. He found great flavour in these men with their tenacity of idea and their distrust of anything unusual. The tinge of obstinacy in his own composition was really akin to theirs. He knew that no talk of his could hide from their penetration the fact that he agreed with them. He knew that none of them would have approached the matter of the bus if they had not been certain of his sympathy. Their perspicacity had not been at fault. He was at heart as indignant as they.

It is the woman in the peasant class who has the initiative. The man is backward and diffident of address, requiring the support of his kind. The operations of nature upon which he attends are, save for phenomena, unfailing in their

regularity. He cannot control them. He can only wait. His experience is certain, if limited, and the tenacity with which he holds his knowledge becomes a safeguard against his ignorance and inexperience in other directions. Mr. Paul felt that the touchiness and irascibility of the simple man upset in his ideas had a root also in his own nature. Conduct whose springs were out of sight was outside the philosophy of these men. It was all very well to have an enemy—*that* was a possible experience—but to have an enemy when " you'd not done nothing to him " was an upheaval on the very horizon.

Young Ben, having all this time been bursting with amusement, at this point revealed its cause to his own speedy undoing.

" Wish you comed along every day, Mr. Paul ! " he said with a grin.

" Then you'd get a holiday of talking," exclaimed Joey, suddenly illuminated. " That's what you'd like, ain't it ? Never do nothing but talk, you wouldn't."

" I ain't said nothing at all," protested young Ben. " I ain't had no chance, I ain't, with you a-talking. Talk the hind leg off a monkey, you would."

" Hind leg off a what ? " squeaked Joey, raising his hoe. Young Ben dodged. Mr. Paul raised his voice.

" I'm afraid it's my fault, Robert. I ought to stay and help you as much as I've hindered."

" No call to do that, Sir," said Robert, with a wink. " We'll make young Ben stop and do a bit extra at the end of the day. We'd better be getting on now or we *shall* get behind."

" It don't do to get it done too quick," explained Joey artlessly, to Mr. Paul. " They gives you something else to do then."

Chapter II

THERE seemed no change in the life of the village during the following week. Perry's bus ran at the usual time and even Saturday morning saw him alone on the road. But on Thursday the much talked-of event happened. It was the day on which cheap tickets were issued to an adjoining seaside town and the country people began to collect in the open space before the Crown and Cushion. Those who came from a distance knew nothing of the new bus, which was standing opposite the inn-door before the earliest passengers arrived.

"Sat up all night, should think!" said the postman as he passed.

Two women, each holding on one arm a substantial basket and by the hand a little boy as uncomfortable as Sunday clothes could make him, and who had set off with the prodigal waste of time which country people commit who live in fear of not being in time, appeared first and stood waiting for Perry's familiar figure.

"We're in plenty of time this morning," said one aloud. "The bus ain't come in yet."

"One of them has," said Turner, coming round

from the head of his horse, to whose blinkers he had been attaching a bunch of ribbons.

" Oh, Mr. Turner, how you frightened me ! " exclaimed one of the women. " I didn't see you there. Are you going to the station for your flour ? "

" I'm going to the station to take passengers. I was just looking for you—the sort of persons to bring me luck," said Turner with jocularity. " Get in, boys ! One, two, three and in ! " he said, lifting the children up.

" Well, I'm sure I never heard you had a bus ! " said one of the women, putting her foot on the step and beginning to climb up.

" Has Mr. Perry given up, then ? " asked the other woman, handing up her basket. The boys, safe inside, were examining and meddling with all the fittings, their " treat " having officially begun.

" Now then, Sammy, sit you down and don't put your feet on them nice cushions ! Jimmy, if you aren't a good boy now, your mother'll put you down and you'll have to stop here till we get back again," poured out the woman who had climbed in first, a little breathless and full of those insincere threats which convince no one. The boys, not quite secure yet of their excursion, wriggled themselves on to the clinging velvet cushion of the bus and became preternaturally

still. The second woman took her seat next to the door and continued her conversation with Turner.

"I didn't know you were starting another bus at Wiat, Mr. Turner," she repeated.

"There's often more than Perry can carry on a market day. He's late as usual, you see," said Turner, his eyes following the movements of a countryman who was entering the square.

"It's nice to get early and get seated comfortable before the rush begins," said the first woman, settling herself further back. "When you've got parcels you like to know there's plenty of room for them, and the same at the station. You like to have a few minutes to take your breath before the train comes in. It upsets you all the day if you have to hurry so. Are you coming up, Mr. Williams? There's plenty of room yet," she added, addressing the countryman.

"I'm waiting for the bus," said the man ostentatiously.

"There's two buses now," said the women together. "You'd better take your place now before the rush comes."

"Perry's my choice!" said the man shortly.

"Then we know," said Turner, with assumed heartiness.

"Yes, you do," replied the man, turning his back and taking out his pipe.

The women, feeling antagonism somewhere, and not quite knowing where it lay, were silenced as women of that class invariably are when two men quarrel and neither is their husband.

"He don't mind being late, seemingly," said Turner, still watching the entrance to the square.

"Mr. Perry is very late this morning," said one of the women placably.

"Oh! he don't mind getting in when the train's at the station. He isn't going himself, so he doesn't care. Never thinks that people have to take their tickets and get into the train."

Turner being evidently out of humour the women proceeded to soothe him.

"Here's Mrs. Horne coming," said one, as a stout, hurrying figure made its appearance. "Come in, Mrs. Horne! We've got plenty of room for you. There's plenty of time. Don't you hurry and upset yourself for nothing!" She reached down for the basket of butter while the new-comer hoisted herself on her short legs into the bus with a prodigious effort.

"Why, whatever have we all got into," she exclaimed in a moment, springing up. "There's Mr. Perry coming in only now. I *am* sorry, I'm sure. I'll get out again at once. I *am* sorry, Mr. Turner, I mistook you for the bus. I don't know how I came to make such a mistake."

"No mistake, Mrs. Horne—you're quite right,"

said Turner, blocking the door. "We've started another bus, you see. I'll take you down in a few minutes."

"Oh, in that case I'll stay where I am and come back with Mr. Perry," said the woman amicably.

But Turner was watching the other bus, which was drawing up in its usual place in front of the post-office. Perry did not seem aware that any vehicle was in the square besides his own. He nodded to the waiting countryman and drew up to allow him to mount. As he did so, two other men emerged from the doorway of the Crown and Cushion in which they had evidently concealed themselves to await events. Without glancing at the other bus, though quite as evidently aware of its presence, they hoisted themselves into Perry's waiting vehicle. In another moment John Fryatt appeared and stood on the cobbled causeway as if in doubt.

"Going down, John?" asked Turner affably. John started.

"Me? No! I'm only waiting. I'm not going to the station," he said, and turned away to speak to one of the men seated in Perry's bus.

Just then, from the other side of the square, appeared Mr. Paul, stepping with his customary alertness and carrying the small brown bag which was his invariable luggage. He was obliged to

FINE ALE
STOUT

pass Turner's bus if he wished to enter Perry's. Would he do so ?

" Good-morning, Mr. Turner. Good morning ! " he said cheerfully, to the watching man. Every person in the square was intently observant.

" Plenty of room for you, Mr. Paul," said Mrs. Horne, who was one of his congregation from the next village.

" Thank you, Mrs. Horne ; I see my old friend Perry expecting me," answered Mr. Paul, and passed on.

The men in Perry's bus made room for the minister with unconcealed smiles as he prepared to mount the steps. Turner saw it and scowled.

" Well, did you ever ! " said Mrs. Horne. " It looks as if we've all quarrelled. All the gentlemen in one bus and all the ladies in another. Did you ever ! "

" Time we were off," said Turner suddenly, jumping on the box with a spring which concealed his ill-humour. He had at that moment thought of the people waiting on the road to the station, whom he might pick up before the other bus arrived. He turned skilfully and rattled out of the square. He had no sooner disappeared than Fryatt jumped into Perry's bus, Hepzibah Hewlett came running with a parcel, and a young farmer who had been standing at the window of an inn at the corner, strolled over the way.

" Take me as far as Green Lane, Sam," he said, mounting to the box-seat.

" Old Bill's gone on to catch up them waiting on the road," said Hepzibah, standing away from the horse as Perry set him in motion.

" I never thought of that," said Perry.

" You'll have to start thinking," returned Hepzibah. " Bill Turner, he's plenty of thoughts in *his* head, you may be sure."

" He have that," said the man who had been first in the bus.

The horses, feeling the reins, had drawn the bus beyond the hearing of Hepzibah's comments. But she had by no means exhausted them and now cast about for someone to break them upon.

" He won't be no match for Turner, not him. He ain't sharp enough unless he's put up to it," she said to herself ; then, turning reluctantly from the empty square, her sharp eyes caught sight of Mrs. Turner, who, under pretence of delivering a cake at the corner had come out to see how her husband fared. Hepzibah hastened to overtake her. For reasons of her own she continued on the opposite side of the square and having come abreast of her quarry, called in a voice loud enough to be heard in every house in the street, but in a tone of complacent amiability :

" Bakery business is doing badly then, Mrs. Turner ? Of course you have such a large family

to provide for; but it seems a pity that Turner should have to try other things at his time of life. It ain't like a young man. All that getting wet and the winter coming on and that—We all thought he was getting on well at the bake-house, but you never knows how people stands, do you? However well they shows up, you never can tell what's behind. And it isn't as if it wouldn't support a single man, or a man with a small family. You've got such a family, haven't you? Willis, that had the business before him, always said there was a good business to be done by anyone as ud give their minds to it, but I suppose Turner didn't fancy it."

"Oh, the business is all right," protested Mrs. Turner, in fluttering indignation. "It's a little too confined for Turner's health, that's all. We think more open air would be good for him."

"And he looks such a strong man, too," said Hepzibah pityingly. "But you never can tell, can you! Sometimes those that looks hale and hearty gets taken first."

Mrs. Turner's perturbation at the thought of the businesss "being in a bad way," encouraged Hepzibah vastly, so that, accompanying her victim as far as her own shop, she continued her torment, adding, as the baker's wife reached her door with evident relief:

"If Mr. Turner's thinking of giving up the

business, I'll just drop a hint to young Ashton at Upton. He's out of his papers with Borrow and he'd be glad to know of a country business he could work up. Being a young unmarried man he'd have a better chance of working it up than Turner has, with all them children to provide for before he begins to put by anything. I'll let him know the way to look next time I goes in to Upton."

But here the baker's wife, having crossed her own white doorstep, was safe from Hepzibah's resonant tongue. She, with a knowing smile which she took no pains to conceal from her only spectators, two dogs lying asleep before their respective houses, said to herself as she made her way to her own house :

"*She* won't come poking round the square again on a market day."

Chapter 12

THE morning was one of the tenderest Spring mornings; so warm that a drive in an open vehicle was already a pleasure; so lit with a mysterious wandering sunshine that one seemed to look upon a new landscape with its every caprice. A blue haze filled the distance with colour and the promise of fair weather. A faint green showed where the pink tips of the larch plantation had stood the week before. A brave golden bush of willow had burst in the hedgerow. The country seemed to have become a little fuller, the lanes more screened. All but the grey, motionless branches of the oaks were wrapped about with green clouds of opening leaves. Hedges, bronze and purple a week ago, showed verdant sides. A soft heat—that unstirred warmth in which the plants quickly germinate and insects make haste to burst their sheathes—filled the atmosphere, with this new visitor, the sun, for company.

Countrymen, accustomed to watching out of doors, are not as a rule talkative. It is their eyes which are active and their ears awake, and the market-bus went at its easy-going pace through the lanes with scarcely a word exchanged.

"Looks very well, that patch there," said one of the men, as they passed a half-ploughed field on which two teams were pacing with dignity.

"Ah—ground's in good heart this morning," returned his companion. "Look at that plum tree," he exclaimed, as they passed the gate of a cottage. "Wouldn't hold another blossom."

"Ain't it pretty!" said the other. "Mr. Paul, have you ever had any apples out of Newsome's garden? He has the biggest in the country, as big as my head they grows. Big green ones as large as this," and he held both hands in the shape of a scoop. "They've got a funny name too. I can't call it to mind. Can you remember the name of them big apples of Newsome's, Sam?" he called up at Perry, raising his voice above the sound of the horse's hoofs.

"Peasegood Nonsuch," replied Perry, turning round and leaning backwards into the bus.

"That's it," said the man. "I knowed it was something comical. Peasegood Nonsuch! You wouldn't think it was a name easy to forget, would you?"

"What do you call it?" asked the third man, "Peasegood Nonsuch? They was hard up for names when they called it that."

"It's a capital apple," said Perry. "Capital! One of them makes a dumpling by itself."

"Do for old Turner," said Fryatt. "He likes a lot for his money."

The other men laughed and looked sideways at Mr. Paul.

"Now, John," said Mr. Paul.

"Oh, I don't know about 'Now, John,'" said Fryatt. "Now Johnning don't alter this new bus of his, do it?"

"I was hoping that it was a foolish threat, but I'm afraid he's been more foolish still and carried out his boast."

"There's no mistake about it," said the farmer who had joined the bus last. "It's a case now of seeing who's going to win."

"*I* shan't say nothing," observed Perry. "If a man don't know his friends now, it's a bad job. I've been coming and going twenty years, and if I ain't known it's no good saying anything more."

Just then a long stretch of straight road showed Turner's green bus drawn up on the road some distance ahead.

"Hello," said Fryatt. Perry fixed his eyes on the object, like a man sighting game.

"I thought so," he exclaimed in a moment.

"What's he stopping for?" asked the farmer, standing up in his place to look under Perry's arm.

"Waiting for a passenger," answered Perry shortly.

As they looked, a man emerged from the cross-

lane at which the bus had drawn up. He was running and climbed quickly to his seat beside the women. The green bus drove on.

"Ben Crompton," said the farmer, sitting down.

"He's on opposite sides to you, Mr. Paul," said the countryman who had first entered Perry's bus. He looked slyly at the minister as he spoke.

"Now, look here!" said Mr. Paul, with an answering twinkle. "We not unnaturally seem unable to keep away from this subject, so just let us have it out now; and first let me say quite frankly that I think it a pity to talk about taking sides, I really do. Don't you think so yourself, Sam?"

"I wasn't the one to begin, Sir," answered Sam.

"You won't be able to help it, Sir," said the farmer at the same time.

"No! I'm afraid it will seem like it," said Mr. Paul. "But here are five of us who can avoid it if we will."

"I don't see why, myself," said the first man. "Nobody said anything about sides till Bill Turner started. I don't see why we've all got to give in to him."

"We don't seem to be giving in to anybody," answered Mr. Paul. "Here we are all driving in as usual with Sam on the box, and here come three more passengers to fill up," he said, as

Perry with a satisfied look drew up at the cross-roads.

Jerry Greenwood hopped cheerfully into the bus and with him two labourers. Sam's depression seemed to raise itself visibly. He felt supported and among friends. The occupants of the bus re-adjusted their positions for the newcomers. With that odd sideways jerk of the head which passes as a salute among rustics, Jerry and his friends settled themselves to their satisfaction. A grin was apparent on the faces of all three. Jerry spied Mr. Paul in the corner.

" Good-morning, Sir," he said. " I was afraid I'd missed the bus this morning. Joe here, he says to me, us coming along, ' Ain't that the bus ? ' he said, ' just crossing now ? ' ' Did you ever know a green bus afore along this road ? ' I says. ' Perry's bus is yellow, always has been, unless he's painted it.' ' Must be my eyes,' says Joe. ' Colour-blind, I expect,' says I. We comes along the road and lo and behold the bus ! ' Yellow, didn't I say, Joe ? ' says I. ' You did,' he says, ' and yellow it is, Jerry.' ' Let's get in ! ' I says, and so we did, didn't we, Joe ? "

Joe, a lean and slow labourer with earth-stained corduroys, replied artlessly, not knowing whether they were joking at him or not. " I suppose so."

The grins of the other men threatened to become fixtures.

"Where be going, Jerry?" asked the farmer.

"Why, ain't this bus going to the station?" asked Jerry innocently.

"Surely," said the other.

"Well, that's where I'm going then," said Jerry.

"No further?" asked the farmer.

"No further," said Jerry.

"Shan't have ne'er a nose to my face if I goes as far," put in Joe.

"I don't know that I shall have one myself," said Jerry.

"Put us both down at the brickfield, Sam, will you?"

"What are you doing here this time of day, you two?" asked the farmer, uneasily conscious that if someone else's men were away from their work, his own might very easily be the same.

"Inauguration ceremony," said Jerry gravely. "Wouldn't miss it for the world." Sam gave a short laugh. "That's so, ain't it, Sam?" said Jerry, turning to Sam's broad back.

"I suppose so," said Sam.

"I met Bill yesterday. Had a little conversation with him," said Jerry. The other men were all ears. 'Well, how are you?' I inquires of him. He *was* busy at that cart-wheel, I can tell you. Never heard nothing. Occupied? You never saw a man so occupied in all your born days.

'Oh!' I says, 'better in health than in temper, seemingly.' Tickled him a bit, that did. 'That's all right!' he says. 'Don't you worry about my temper,' he says. 'Hope your own'll be as good to-morrow,' he says.

"'What's happening to morrow?'" I says. I knowed all right, for I'd been round and had a look at that green wagon of his night before."

"'Inauguration ceremony!' he says, and gives a nasty laugh.

"'Oh, that's what you calls it,' says I. 'I'll be there all right.'

"He took off his hat and began stroking the ribbon. 'It's time I had a new one,' he said, and then that son of his—you know him—Jimmy, I think he's called—very spit of his father, he is—burst out laughing and they went off together."

"Weasel-'ead," said the farmer in disgust.

The station was by this time in sight and the passengers could be seen alighting from the other bus—Crompton was observed to go round to the box and shake hands with Turner before he vanished through the white gate of the platform. The green bus then drew aside for two gigs which were making for the station. Mr. Paul spoke suddenly from his corner.

"Now, since I have been sitting here with you all, do you know what has been running through

my mind ? " Mr. Paul spoke seriously and the men looked a little uncomfortable in anticipation.

" No, it isn't quite fair of me," he added, answering their looks. " But let me tell you how it has been striking me. I was thinking of the dear friend with whom I spend my life. How patient and long suffering I am to him. If he is slighted, how I suffer. I am unhappy till he is recovered. I spend hours in thinking of his comfort and his well-being. I find myself able to forgive him all his shortcomings, and yet he is subject to fits of anger, to sudden uncontrolled annoyance. Again and again he falls into this sin, and each time I have such pity and patience with him. But when I am required to have pity on the failings of someone whom I dislike how hard I find it. If my friend (which God forbid) had taken this advantage of another, how diligently I should seek for an excuse. He might be pressed by family matters—his besetting sin had betrayed him—a kind expostulation might prevent his going further in this unworthiness. But that man whom I dislike—what excuse is there for him ? Why, only this new year," concluded Mr. Paul, as the bus drew near the station-gate, " I made the resolution to be more than ever kind and considerate and gentle to my friend through the year."

Mr. Paul prepared to get down.

"I didn't know you lived with anyone, Sir," said the farmer.

"I do indeed," said Mr. Paul.

"What's his name, Sir?" asked Jerry, having observed a smile on the minister's face.

"Enoch Paul," said he, as he walked away towards the station.

"I thought he was having us," said Jerry. "Here Joe, you and me better get along back again."

Chapter 13

THAT the station-master should put both passengers for the up-train in one carriage, holding the door open until both had got in, seems a very reasonable thing, especially since the carriage was empty. Yet Mr. Paul was conscious of disappointment that for the next half-hour of that slow train his companion was to be the evangelist, Crompton. With a laugh at his own expense, he told himself that he had very quickly been given the opportunity to practise his own sermon. He disliked anew the narrow set of Crompton's eyes and his sanctimonious manners. Here, then, was an opportunity of finding out his excellences. He reminded himself, as he took his seat, that here was a man who professed to serve the same Master as himself.

How ashamed he would be if the Lord should find his disciples at variance.

"A lovely morning," he observed, with cordiality.

"It is indeed," said Crompton with a sigh, which might be over the beauty of the morning or from the effort of getting into the carriage. He glanced at his companion and then said :

"How gratifying it is to know that the friends at Wiat will not henceforth be left to the irregularities of a drunken bus-driver, as they have been in the past." It was as well that Mr. Paul had reminded himself that this was one of Jesus' disciples.

He answered quietly.

"I hardly recognise my old friend Perry under that description. He has worked diligently for twenty years and no one has ever found him incompetent, I think. Surely a character of twenty years should stand a man in good stead now. I should be sorry to feel that twenty years of my own work had been of so little weight and usefulness."

"Ah, the work of the Lord is a thing apart," said Crompton importantly. "But Perry has been very neglectful of late, very irregular. It is a great pity," he said, returning to his defences. "It will be a comfort to have a sound reliable man like Turner—a great comfort."

"Are any instances being given of Perry's irregularities?" asked Mr. Paul.

"Certainly!" replied Crompton promptly, as if he had been waiting for this. "Miss Lydiate said long ago that rather than employ Perry again she would go to the expense of hiring a trap from the Crown and Cushion for herself. That's a strong statement of the case, Mr. Paul."

"Did Perry fail Miss Lydiate only that once?" asked Mr. Paul.

"I believe so," answered Crompton. "But you know, Mr. Paul, as I often say to my people, it depends on the importance of that one time. It was an important engagement, I believe, and it's the fact of never being able to count on him for ever after. 'I don't feel as though I shall ever trust him again,' Miss Lydiate said to me."

"Is there no room for repentance?" asked Mr. Paul, with a kind smile. "I think Henry Jennet can put that right if you ask him. He is a very good friend to poor Sam. But surely one lapse in twenty years may be forgiven to a man, a man so situated, too, as Sam is in his home life. There have never been complaints about the bus from the country people, have there? Everyone has seemed satisfied."

"Oh, not the irregularity of the bus," explained Crompton. "It's Perry's *life* that's irregular! On the day that he failed Miss Lydiate, he was

seen *drunk*." Mr. Paul's dislike of drunkenness being well known, he awaited the effect. Mr. Paul seemed unperturbed.

" Are the people then so suddenly become aware of poor Perry's failing and are they horrified so quickly ? " asked the minister drily. " A sign of grace that I confess I hadn't observed. I must preach a sermon on temperance to them. They would seem to be ready for it."

" I'm afraid the drinking habits of the village are our hardest task," said Crompton evasively.

Now whether Mr. Paul was nettled by the use of the word " our," or whether his enemy betrayed him, the fact was that his gorge was rising. He did not reply to Crompton's generalisation, but in a decided and serious tone began :

" I cannot hear ! I must protest against the danger to a poor man's character ! You must reflect seriously before you take it upon yourself to repeat so damaging a statement. Perry is *not* a drunken and disreputable fellow. I am as grieved as you are, or can be, that he and so many more are given to drinking at the public-house. But I cannot consent to sit here and listen to a statement which I believe would be injurious to any man's character. His home, as you know, is unhappy and uncared for through no fault of his own. The public-house is open and he has many friends there. But it is infamous to describe

Perry publicly as drunken and irregular. He is neither the one nor the other!" Mr. Paul became aware of his companion's expression of satisfaction, and recovered his temper with an effort.

"It's a great pain to me to hear a minister of the gospel defend slackness of character," said Crompton, with marked satisfaction. "We cannot be too careful in our walk and conversation. Surely you feel it a mistake to condone drunkenness in any man. There are many of us who feel that it is an advance in public morals when a man like Turner takes the helm, as it were. Miss Lydiate was only saying to me this morning, when I passed the house, 'I feel, Mr. Crompton—why, I feel quite different about it.'"

Since Miss Lydiate's house lay quite out of the road by which Crompton must travel to the station, it was at once evident to Mr. Paul that he had made a special visit to that lady to feel, as it were, her temperature, in the matter of the bus. His indignation overflowed its restraining gentleness and found vent.

"Is *betting* then not a public sin?" he exclaimed. "Is a bet made to *ruin* a man—a bet over an actual drinking transaction, and that not at leisure after work but in working-time—is *that* an advance in morals. Is a man capable of

such vindictive feeling that he will hold to a bet made in an evil inspiration—a bet which has outraged the feelings even of the man in whose house it was made—is *that* man to take his place as a public benefactor. Is *avarice* then to be condoned, while drunkenness goes before a man to judgment? Call it if you will a public lapse of morals and I will agree with you. An evil spirit has taken possession of the man. I hoped that his own good sense would have shown him the pettiness and meanness of such a bet when he reflected upon it. I can understand a sharp dispute having such a bet for its outcome. I can understand some irritating provocation arousing opposition which might lead to a heady speech. But to maintain such an attitude after the provocation has passed—to persist in what must mean embarassment to a man who has done him no harm and who was certainly not present at *that* drinking-transaction, *that* savours of spite and an evil spirit which is *not* of God and *not* calculated to raise the moral atmosphere of any village. I must protest against such a perversion and hope that public opinion will make Turner ashamed of his conduct. No doubt," continued Mr. Paul more gently, "he will see things in another light presently. The irritation must have been more severe than we can see at the moment and left a more lasting effect. No doubt he will be the

first to be sorry when things are pointed out to him. We must all try to talk it over amiably and kindly, and I feel sure some way out will be found. Is it for nothing that the Master has had patience with us for so many years. Will not His Spirit inspire us to similar forbearance with one another ? "

The row of red-brick houses, with the chimney of a laundry, which ushered in the dull little town in which Mr. Paul lived, now slid past the train. The acid smell of engine-smoke filled the carriage as the train entered the low-roofed station. Mr. Paul rose and, taking his much-rubbed leather handbag, offered his hand to Crompton. The glow of his face was very happy as his passion for his Master shone upon it, and Crompton took his hand without reservation.

He was a good man as far as he knew how to be. A poor brain and an upbringing always concerned with the opinions of others had produced a character full of petty suspicions and self-consciousness. The large-hearted and unconscious personality of the wiser and better man tempted his narrow heart to a corresponding warmth, and the hearty grasp of Mr. Paul's hand to a sense of cordiality not often felt by him. It was as if a warm breath had passed and thawed a frozen body, and Mr. Paul in his turn received a sudden regret that he had judged his brother. As he

left the dingy station and turned into the commonplace street he remembered with simplicity that to whom much had been given from him should much be required. "And to whom," asked Mr. Paul of his simple heart, "has more been given than to me? What shall I render to Him? What shall I render?" asked Mr. Paul, with his heart burning, as he walked briskly through the town whose small shop-keepers were arranging their goods to the best advantage, while small alert boys polished the brass window plates and breathed on the glass to get it clearer, and where women with skirts turned back were washing as many doorsteps as there were house-fronts in the street.

Chapter 14

IT may be doubted whether any two men in the parlour of the Buck i' th' Vine had arranged to meet there on the evening of the day on which Turner had first run his bus. But the parlour was unusually full that evening, and each of the conscious men who made their way thither had come full of expectancy. That some line would be taken, or at any rate something said, was the opinion of the three miles round Wiat which had already heard of the wager. How a ploughman at work in a field two miles away, who sat down to eat his bread and cheese under the hedge of that field and who put up his horses for the night within a stone's throw of it, could know that Turner had run his bus from Wiat that morning; how a hedger who had slept in an old sheepfold three miles away could know that Mr. Paul had gone as usual with Perry and Crompton had chosen Turner, might puzzle one unaccustomed to the country. Jarvis, the cowman, taking four calves to the station at five o'clock that morning, might have explained his stoppages on the way home; or Collis, bringing home his

empty milk-cans, might have explained why several men appeared at the Buck i' th' Vine expecting sport that evening. Neither *did* explain because neither thought it unusual for two men five miles apart to be aware of occurrences within a few hours of their having happened. Nor did Entwistle, the postman, who, filling his slack bag at the various road post-boxes, might have accounted for several more.

The parlour was hot and steaming and smoky. John Fryatt was perspiring even in his shirt-sleeves by reason of his exertions at the bar-handle. One could almost fix the occupations of the men by their promptitude or reluctance to sit down—sitting down being the last act of the labourer and one immediately preparatory to going to bed; whereas the carter or workman feels himself self-conscious on his feet and looks about at once to find a seat where he may drink his beer with support.

The round table had been taken from the corner and set in the middle of the room. It was surrounded by men with pots of beer. A group of men stood at the bar and three others were seated on the bench near the fire. It was above a considerable and sustained hum of voices that young Armitage, who kept a forge between Wiat and Honeyton, tilted his chair backwards and addressed John Fryatt over his shoulder.

" That's a queer thing, Bill Turner starting a bus, isn't it, John ? "

The hubbub ceased on the instant.

" It's queerer than necessary," observed a man at the table, taking his pipe from the corner of his mouth to throw his words at the company.

" He'll soon stop," said a labourer. " Not enough money in it for Bill Turner."

" I heard he'd made a bet over Perry's head," said a man by the fire.

" I heard that and all," said another.

" I heard that and I heard him do it. It wur done in this bar," said Fryatt.

" And what was you lot thinking of to let it be done in this bar ? " demanded Armitage. " Ain't this your bar and ain't we all friendly. It's a caution, making bets like that behind a man's back."

" I had nothing to do with it. I hadn't, indeed," protested Fryatt. " 'Twas all done before I could pull that handle. It all came of Jerry Greenwood and Turner being here together—a thing I've not known to happen this ten years I've been at the Buck. They cannot abide the smell of one another's breath. Like a terrier, Jerry is, at the smell of a rat ! Up and at him, and Turner up and at him again, and there it was, and Turner out of the house and us all looking at one another as cumflustered as a row of little cats on

hot bricks. Jerry there, he laughed at it, and *I* laughed as well. I never thought a man of sense and eddication would do a foolish thing like that—for foolish it is, however you look at it, and Bill Turner's as sharp as most. He can't run two businesses well, can he! and we've got Perry's word for it that the bus has only enough custom for one man. 'Tisn't likely then, is it, that he wants his son to have it and it going down as it is? No! there's something behind. Either *he* thinks it's better than *it* is or *we* think *he's* better than *he* is."

A hum of laughter rewarded this effort. Men took their pipes from their mouths and nodded assent to one another. Some remained with the appreciative grins on their faces and then suddenly took long drinks of beer as if they had betrayed themselves. As the laugh died down, a very old man who had been waiting his opportunity restlessly, seized impatiently on the pause—

"Bus-driving," he began in a harsh croak. Everyone turned.

"Oh, you're there, Jimmy," said Fryatt. "We didn't see you."

The old man was too intent on getting his chance to hear him.

"Bus-driving," he repeated. "It ain't nothing like it was." His thoughts had wavered in the effort to impress himself on the company—

" There was a man at Sixpenny Hanley," he went on, recovering his idea. " He was called Billy Jackson. His wife was cut in pieces going over the level crossing. Upsetted him dreadful it did. ' 'Tain't having her dead,' he says, ' that I minds so much. 'Tis having her dead in little pieces I can't abide,' he says. And it was *his* brother got £100 left him and started a bus. Put it all into the bus-driving and *his* wife died in the 'sylum."

" What did she do that for ? " asked Fryatt, as Jimmy finished amid a burst of coughing and laughter.

" Worritting," gasped Jimmy, wiping his eyes one after the other with a red handkerchief. " There's a lot of worritting in a bus."

" Mr. Paul sticks by Perry, doesn't he ? " asked Armitage.

" ' I see no reason to change,' says Mr. Paul, quite pleasant," returned Fryatt. " A fine fellow that, you know—laughs hearty—talks open. I likes to see him swing his stick round, don't you. Stands a good six feet three, I should think. Wonder where Bill Turner *got* his bus ? "

" I couldn't say, I'm sure," answered the blacksmith. " Anyway he's got it and he means business."

" He means that all right," said Armitage.

" Well, I should say the question is, not what

he means or is going to mean, but is he to be let to have his own way ? " put in a man who was leaning against the fireplace. At this moment the door was pushed open and Jerry Greenwood entered. The door swung behind him and a complete silence fell on the company.

" Evening all," said Jerry. " Pint of bitter, John." He seated himself and drank deeply, took off his hat and wiped his head, then replaced his hat.

" Warm," he said.

" Warm ! " assented the blacksmith. " How's this bus, Jerry ? " he broke through the assumed nonchalance of the new-comer.

" Bad," said Jerry whole-heartedly. The company seemed relieved. " But he's not going to do as he likes. Stands to reason you can't take away another man's business like that."

" Don't seem nothing to hinder it," said Jarvis the cowman. " He got a full bus this morning, didn't he ? "

" It was some women from a distance, as far as I could see," said Fryatt. " Once it gets round everybody, shouldn't think there'll be any chance for Bill Turner."

" It's a caution ! " said the cowman.

" It's a pity Marky Goff ain't here," interposed the man leaning against the fireplace.

"What was that?" asked Fryatt. "I never heard that tale."

"Why, it was over at Honeyton," replied the man, while all shifted a little to look at him. "Old granfer Goff had vexed Marky over something or another; didn't need much vexing, didn't Marky. Like a pot of pepper he was! Come along next morning, old granfer did. 'Hello!' he says. 'What's happened to t'trap?' he says. 'Anything wrong with the trap?' says Marky, getting up and fastening up his leggings. 'If you don't know what's wrong with the trap you get up and go and look,' said old gaffer. 'Anything wrong?' says he, and he offs and outs. Marky, he didn't go to the stable, went off to the meadow, he did, to feed the bullocks. Dinner-time he comes home and there was old gaffer gone to Upton market in Farmer Mead's trap. So Marky goes into the yard and turns over the mixen with a pikel and there was the trap-wheels he'd taken off and hidden in the muck. Washes them under the pump, he does, and puts 'em on again. Gaffer comes home again. 'Where's the trap-wheels, you young jail-bird?' he says.

"What trap-wheels?' says Marky. 'There ain't nothing wrong with the trap I can see. You must have been drunk, grandad,' he says.

"'Drunk' says old Goff. 'Where's the trap-wheels?'

"'On the trap,' says Marky. 'You haven't looked proper.'

"'There ain't no wheels on the trap, I tell you!' says gaffer. 'Should I have gone along with Joe Mead if there had 'ave been?'

"'Well, I can't see nothing wrong with the trap!' says Marky.

"Gaffer he goes out to the shed and sees the wheels on the trap. 'Old Nick!' he says, and that's all. 'Old Nick!' and never a word more did he say to Marky. 'He won't worry me no more,' says Marky. 'What did he do to you?' asks Joe. 'Stopped me ferreting last week, he did,' said Marky. Old gaffer never said another word. 'Old Nick,' he said, and that's all."

"Marky didn't stop long after that, did he?" asked Armitage.

"Up and off to Australia he was. There's no taking wheels off Bill Turner's bus. Shuts it up too tight."

"Mr. Paul," put in Fryatt, "he's all for keeping quiet and not talking. He thinks Bill Turner'll get tired if he's let alone, and if we talk he'll be all the more set on it. But as I told him, it wasn't anybody who talked till Bill Turner began it. It stands to reason we can't all sit still and be quiet."

"Mr. Paul, he's all for us holding our noise,"

said Jarvis. "I think the more noise we make the better, myself."

"And so do I," said the man at the fireplace.

The door opened again.

"Hello, Sam!" roared the whole room together. "Come on, Sam!"

Heels were stamped and more beer called for. Chairs were moved and Sam Perry was welcomed with an ovation. "For he's a jolly good fellow," started Armitage, and the company assented with more or less of melody. The same jokes began again, followed by the same indignation and the same helpless talking round the subject of the bet. Everyone agreed that the more noise made about it the better, and the further it was heard the better. Sam Perry warmed his heart at the fire of this loud sympathy. It was going to be a fight and he had plenty of backers.

Chapter 15

IT must not be supposed that so large a stone could have fallen in the mill-pond of existence at Wiat without its ripples arousing the agitation of that chronicler of events, Mrs. Huniset. That the bus should have started its opposition journey on this first day without her, was astonishing enough, the truth being, that in her hurry to get out that morning, she had overturned the pigs' mash on to her foot, and being very particular about boiling it, as many people of her acquaintance were not ("it makes 'em fat down so nice," she averred), the mash had scalded her foot and hindered her until the rival vehicles had started for the station. But no one

ever haunted the scene of his crime as Mrs. Huniset haunted the street of the village during the day, nor did detective watch his quarry more relentlessly than the black-eyed gossip scrutinised both drivers and passengers as they alighted on the return of the buses in the evening. There was very little to be gained from the demeanour of either. The greater part were occupied in rescuing bundles from beneath the seat. One stout woman had spilt a bag of washing soda on the floor of Perry's bus and he was busy dragging the rug to the edge of the steps while she held a bucket underneath to catch her spilt purchase. Turner ostentatiously settled the window-frames and timber with which the front part of his bus was filled, and mounting again with a spring, drove off down the street. Mrs. Huniset's "Good evening, Mr. Turner," he ignored as completely as he ignored the men standing in the doorway of the Crown and Cushion and watching his movements and the expression of his face with the utmost intentness. Sam Perry also ignored Mrs. Huniset, and having shaken his rug and re-laid it, nodded to the men in the doorway and took his horse by the bridle. A few doors farther down the street he stopped to extricate a hamper for a woman who stood at the garden-gate waiting. The two carried it up between them; along the cobbled path edged with box to the white stone

cottage covered by a plum-tree in blossom. A cheery japonica with coral blossom flamed at the side of the door. Sam broke off a piece and put it in his cap. As he opened the gate again his horse started off on its own account. Sam sauntered out of sight by its side.

There was a quite definite line of modest conduct in Mrs. Huniset's mind. She had no objection to standing in the street with any one man who might be standing there also. But to stand with a group of men would have been to imperil her good name. So her fishing had been poor and disappointing, and nothing more was to be gained by watching an empty street. Also she found that she herself was becoming in her turn the object of attention to the group at the public-house, and she knew by experience that men in company were apt to be noisy in personal remarks. So she turned into the village store to buy a packet of needles. She had hardly opened the door when close on her heels appeared Hepzibah Hewlett.

"Have Mr. Collis left a basket for me?" she asked.

The girl behind the counter stooped and lifted the basket over to Hepzibah, who took possession of it, covered as it was with brown paper and securely tied with string.

"I never saw you in the bus," said Mrs. Huniset.

"Thought you was going to Upton to-day, wasn't you?"

"I don't need no bus," said Hepzibah, her pugnacious face settling into a grim smile. "Got a carriage of my own." The girl behind the counter laughed.

"I ain't come in the bus anyway, and yet I ain't come afoot," said Hepzibah.

"Ah! You come in old Collis's milk-cart, that's what you did," said the girl.

"You're too clever by half," answered Hepzibah. "Old Bill Turner a-mimming and a-mawing! He ain't going to sit atop of me, though. No man ain't never done that yet and Bill Turner ain't going to be the one to begin," and Hepzibah's mouth snapped close.

"What did he do?" asked Mrs. Huniset, at last on a scent.

"Do!" exclaimed Hepzibah; "it's what he *didn't* do! Left me behind, he did."

"Ain't he a ferret!" said Mrs. Huniset.

"He've been hatching it up in his mind this long enough, that's what he have," said Hepzibah. "All the time I was coming along I was thinking. Now what's behind it. It's not natural. I can't make it out. Never seen anything like it before. If Sam had done anything to him now for him to pay back. But spiteful like this! Upon my word it *do* look well, it do indeed."

"Dicky Turner was saying that his father ud do it in a year," said the girl.

"Don't you have nothing to do with Dicky Turner!" said Hepzibah grimly. "You won't have no money to spend *then*, I knows. His mother never has a penny of her own. You take my word and let someone else keep you as long as they will. You never know the size of your belly till your feet's under your own table. Don't you be in a hurry for Dicky Turner!"

"I wouldn't look at him," replied the girl. "Mary Williams she goes out with him, she told me."

"They're all alike, them Turners. All the same cabbage-stalk *they* growed on," said Hepzibah.

Mrs. Huniset's black eyes had been upon the street all this time.

"See there," she said suddenly, nudging Hepzibah.

"There he goes," said she turning suddenly. Both women rushed to the open door to watch, and the girl behind the counter moved the window curtain, knocking her head against a box of biscuits as she did so. Bill Turner passed and entering his own bake-house, shut the door. He did not reappear.

"He don't half look a ferret," repeated Mrs. Huniset.

"Well, I must go," declared Hepzibah, in a hurry all at once. "Bus or no bus, Turner or no Turner, Robert won't get his tea if I don't go home and do it."

"I'll go along with you as far as Perry's," offered Mrs. Huniset.

"I'll be bound you will," said Hepzibah under her breath, as she went on in front. "I ain't going that way," she called over her shoulder.

"Ain't it shortest?" asked Mrs. Huniset.

"Shortest *and* steepest," returned Hepzibah. "I don't fancy myself going up like a little frog, all hands and legs, over green bank. Good night," and she turned abruptly up a side lane.

She had not taken more than a few steps along it before she ran quickly back to the street again to watch where Mrs. Huniset went. She saw her go straight on until she turned aside by a drooping tree at the roadside.

"I thought little Mary couldn't keep out of it long," she said to herself. "There's more noses than one in Wiat seemingly," with which obscure statement she retraced her steps and went on to her own home.

Chapter 16

MRS. HUNISET would have described herself as "meek-hearted," a term which meant a person easily moved to tears at a rebuff. She was not sure, as she left Hepzibah, of her reception at Sam Perry's house, nor could she think of an excuse for a visit. Her pace became slower as she came in sight of the garden wall. But fortune favours the malicious in certain small details, if only to destroy them later on, and as Mrs. Huniset drew slowly nearer, observing all she could on the outside—the bus in the yard, its shafts turned back, the fowls grubbing about and the sow with her litter—the youngest Perry ran out into the road in pursuit of a sulphur butterfly and fell sprawling on the ground. Mrs. Huniset made one pounce and picking him up felt elaborately for any hurt, then carried him with loud commiserations to the cottage. The child, feeling that something had happened to him, began to whimper, and it was a successful enough entry that Mrs. Huniset obtained to her objective.

"Found him lying in the road all by himself, I did," she explained loudly. "We better look

and see if he hasn't sprained his ankle. Look at his poor legs," and Mrs. Huniset's fat hand found and stroked a week-old scar.

" Put your foot down, Jimmy, and see if you can stand on it, poor little thing," she said fussily, still holding the boy. The child set his foot to the ground, and there being nothing whatever the matter with it, stood on it.

" See now," said Mrs. Huniset. " I found him lying on the ground. Couldn't get up ! Lying on the ground he was ! " and the child being thus volubly explained, she was at leisure to follow the scent of that nose which Hepzibah Hewlett had apostrophised as not being singular in the village of Wiat.

Mrs. Perry's pale gentle face showed a normal expression. Sam had just finished his tea apparently. Lighting his pipe and putting his hat on his head, he pushed back his chair and strode out of the door to the stable, turning his back on the visitor and saying to the whimpering child as he passed, " Shut up."

" Are you going to feed Whitefoot ? " asked the boy, scrambling to his feet and running after his father.

" Well, don't children forget about things," said Mrs. Huniset, a little taken aback. " It's a good thing, too, they don't know all the troubles they've got before them. Forgets as easy. Why,

the other night the ferret got laid up. Huniset came down for a rabbit-skin (we always has a lot hanging behind the haystack). To tempt the ferret out it was. He dursn't leave it in the lay because of everybody's chickens being hatched out. They wouldn't have none by morning. Well, he was only gone a few minutes, and if Tommy wasn't off playing marbles! 'Didn't I tell you not to take your eyes off that run?' says his father. 'Ferret ain't come out, have it?' he says. 'You do as you're told next time or you'll know the length of my stick,' says his father. But forget! He'd forget everything but his dinner, and he never do forget that." From being shrill and voluble, Mrs. Huniset's voice now became wheedling and confidential.

"I suppose Sam doesn't say anything to you about this bus of Bill Turner's?"

"Oh, it is wicked," said Mrs. Perry, becoming suddenly excited. "All done in that underhand way. Sam, he won't speak anything at all. But he sits and thinks and broods." She stopped abruptly. "'Don't you talk about it,' he says to me, and here I am talking."

"People can't help their feelings," said Mrs. Huniset. "Everybody has their own feelings. There's my mother now never goes near Alway Brook. She had all her children in that cottage down there. Bred and born we all was down

there, and when my father died they moved her to a cottage at the top of the hill. But she never got used to it. She never went past Alway Brook again. It hurted her feelings. So Sam doesn't talk much, Mary ? "

" Never to me," replied Mary. " I wish he would. It would ease his mind. Mr. Paul said, ' I should discuss it as little as possible,' and Sam has a great respect for Mr. Paul. But he says nothing to me at all. He came in an hour ago. ' Did Bill Turner do his wicked deed ? ' I said. ' Don't you name no Bill Turner to me,' he said. ' He've started it,' he said. He was one of a large family was Sam, and didn't have much schooling, so he talks broadly at times. ' He've started it all right,' he said, and ate his tea brooding and brooding. Such wickedness will be punished in the world above. He'll soon be gone to the Buck. Such things drive a man to drink."

This was too appetising a morsel for Mrs. Huniset to pass unrelished. " Fancy her saying that and everyone knows what sends Sam to the Buck ! " she ejaculated mentally. She craned her neck to look over the short blind of lace which covered the lower half of the window.

" He's going," she said. " Look ! he's going off over the back hedge. See ! he's got through where it's broken, so's he won't be seen from the house."

The door opened as she peered round the corner of the window and there entered the child who had been the cause of Mrs. Huniset's entry into the cottage. Full of importance he advanced to the middle of the room; and putting a hand in each pocket he delivered himself in a shrill voice which had the effect of a shout, of the following message:

"My dad says"—Mrs. Huniset turned and stared at the child, who repeated with a titter.

"My dad says—'them that pushes open other people's doors'll get their fingers trapped.' That's what my dad says."

The offended crimson of Mrs. Huniset's face disconcerted the boy, who repeated his message the second time with less confidence. "Them that pushes open other people's doors'll get their fingers trapped," then finding the atmosphere somehow too electric, began to whimper. Mrs. Huniset began to sniff.

"I never knew anything like it. I know my father always said, 'Don't you go sympathising with other people. *They'll* not thank you, however you goes,' he says. 'They'll not thank you,' he says," and the offended Mrs. Huniset turned and went.

Chapter 17

THE determination of Turner was visible now to all the world and was received in a dozen ways. The majority resented the innovation. First, it was done by someone whom they disliked. Second, it was done in a scandalous manner. Third, they were used to Sam Perry, who had been there twenty years, and Bill Turner they scarcely knew. But most of all they disliked the necessity of making a decision. It was all very well to abuse Perry if he was late or careless, but it was quite another matter to have him superseded by Bill Turner, who was " putting by " already. The majority declared themselves willing to stand by Perry.

Miss Lydiate, indeed, declared herself very well satisfied since she had quite decided not to employ Perry any more. As far as she was concerned she considered it providential. Hepzibah Hewlett loudly decided to take whichever bus was first, since she considered buses to exist for the convenience of the public and not the public for the convenience of the bus-drivers. So that on the day of her going to the station she settled herself

and her bundle in the old familiar bus with the yellow body.

"First come, first served," she said aloud as Turner passed. He threw her an angry glance.

"Face as long as a wet week, he've got," she jeered. But it was another matter when she emerged from the station at night tired and footsore, with her one bundle increased to four, and found that Perry had driven away with a full bus and that Turner was quickly filling his available space with timber and window-frames. The unconcealed pleasure with which he turned away from her entreaty to take her bundles if he had no room for herself showed Hepzibah that matters were to be managed with a high hand.

"First come, first served," said the man sardonically, as he mounted with an energetic jump and drove off without looking behind him.

"We shall know where we stand then," shouted Hepzibah after him.

"We shall," retorted Turner, driving on with an empty seat beside him.

Hepzibah was too tired to retaliate, and besides she had a large capacity for indignation This could be postponed for a time.

"Will you give me a lift to Green Lane, Mr. Collis?" she asked a man who was loading an empty float with milk-cans.

"All right," said the man without turning

round or otherwise suspending his operations. Hepzibah sat on a pile of timber which had lain for weeks in the open place round the station. Indignation was gathering mass and impetus within that irrascible nature of hers, but with that understanding of mankind which is the peasant-woman's book of learning, she knew that the man beside her would say nothing until his float was loaded. She watched him, a slow, lean, taciturn carter who continued his work with his back toward her.

"He won't break no one's heart with talking. Upon my word, he won't!" she said to herself. But she was asking a favour and she waited good-humouredly.

At last the man she had called Collis slammed the flap of the milk-float and went round to take the reins from the station-paling to which they had been fastened.

"Ain't much of a fellow, Bill Turner," he observed, as though he had been occupied with this matter all the time and had at length come to a decision upon it.

"That he ain't," returned Hepzibah with emphasis.

"Thinks he can rule the road, he do," said the man. "Put 'em in atop of them cans," he added, referring to the bundles. Hepzibah swung them in and came round to the front of the float.

"I can get up all right, Mr. Collis," she said, as she clambered with agility on to the shaft. "Old fellow ain't been so clever as he thinks after all."

"No, he's done this time," assented the man, getting up slowly and tipping the float down to one side as he did so.

"He's the sort of fellow would skin a flint and break a penknife worth sixpence skinning of it," said Hepzibah. "That's what he'd do. But he ain't going to sit atop of *me*. I ain't had no man ever sit atop of me yet, and Bill Turner needn't think he's going to be the one to begin."

"He *do* think it, seemingly," said Collis. "Left you behind, didn't he? Got a empty place aside of him, hadn't he?"

"Thought you was loading milk-cans," said Hepzibah drily. "He ain't done with me yet, though. He had a row with Mr. Clarke the other day. Them two can't abide the smell of one another's breath. Upon my word they can't. Called each other every name but gentleman they did. 'Pon my bob, Mrs. Hewlett,' says Bob Pearce to me. 'Pon my bob, I didn't know there was so much language in the world,' and he went off laughing like to split."

"Pretty smart names some of 'em. I heerd 'em," said Collis.

" But Bill Turner he didn't get the best of it there. Old Mr. Clarke he *have* a language. He have indeed."

The milk-float jogged along with a cheerful rattle of empty cans. It was the last vehicle to leave the station and the road was clear of travellers. The gaunt yellow horse, as deliberate as his master, sauntered home with much whisking of his white thick tail.

It had been a spring day full of swift changes. All day the sky had been lighter than the earth. The brilliancy of its clouds laid heavy shadows upon the fields. Then sunshine and clouds together were in shreds, glittering fugitives betraying the presence of wind in the sky. A moment's sobriety, and at once from the golden depth where the clouds were present, but without outline, the sun streamed effulgent, the heavens were suddenly alight and the earth gleaming. Now, late in the day, the sunlight was low. The air was clear golden and fine, like the light through an alabaster window or that caught in the heart of a golden grape. The vivid cool quality of a Spring which had not forgotten Winter invigorated the blood.

" Frosty, ain't it ? " said Hepzibah sniffing.

" Look at that meadow," replied Collis.

" So I do see," said Hepzibah. " I thought my toes feeled cold."

"Mr. Paul, he was all for speaking fair," observed Collis. "He won't stop it, I think."

"Mr. Paul won't do nothing," retorted Hepzibah. "He thinks everyone's as good as himself, and Bill Turner ain't that by a bit yet."

"No," said Collis, as if it was a new idea. "He ain't that, is he?"

"But he ain't going to do as he likes with me," reiterated Hepzibah. "I'll go as I please and I'll come as I please, without asking his likings. Here's Green Lane now, Mr. Collis. You couldn't carry this basket to the shop, could you. Leave it there and Jackie'll call for it to-night."

Hepzibah stood up. Collis drew rein and the yellow horse stretched his head after the grass by the roadside, pulling the float nearer as he reached.

"Woa," said Collis, and Hepzibah sat down suddenly. She rose and put one foot over the shaft, jumping energetically to the ground. With a skip she was round at the back and had lifted her other bundles out. In the meantine, Collis tilted sideways at an amazing angle, was drawing something from the remote depths of his trouser pocket. Hepzibah stood curious. Collis slowly drew upright and showed a silver ring, which he pushed over the first joint of his finger.

"I'll put my ring on and then I shall remember the basket," he said, answering Hepzibah's curious stare. "It's the way I remembers things. I

keep on fidge, fidging at my ring and I says, Now whatever did I put that on for, and so I worries till I *does* remember. If I puts my ring on I shall remember all right."

"Good-night and thank you," said Hepzibah, as Collis pulled up his horse's head and jogged on without turning his own. Then she re-adjusted her bundles and walking on in Green Lane was soon lost to sight in the now heavy shade of filberts and alder trees.

Chapter 18

MARY PERRY, so much discussed in the village of Wiat and so unhelped, partly from ignorance and inability as to where to begin to help her—had one friend in the village. Unlike Mrs. Huniset, Mollie Tye was hardly ever known to leave her cottage. Her messages were done for her by urchins whom she beckoned to her door as they passed on the way to school, and paid for by a ripe plum or winter apple when they were done. Perhaps the certainty of finding Mollie at home was the reason that Mary Perry would often stray to her cottage in her times of mental weakness. Mollie and the church were stable in the midst of her confusion. Mollie was eccentric in more ways than that of never leaving her cottage. "I cannot be hurried. I must do things my own way," were phrases very often on her lips. She was a very small woman, almost as broad as long, with suspicious and rather resentful little blue eyes and a mouth drawn in tightly so as to allow nothing to escape her without her will. She was constantly afraid of betraying secrets (of which she had none) and it was another of her figures of speech to say, "I told them

nothing at all about it," and indeed, she was so anxious not to betray confidence that she often withheld necessary information. When she laughed, which was not often, she had a feeble but gay little chuckle, and she walked with small tripping steps like a child. Since she never went out she had her own way of judging the weather. She knew whether it would be fine by the smoke in her open chimney, by the drawing of her oven, by the degree of dampness on her tiled floor and by the appearance of the thatch on her roof. But there was only one kind of weather that mattered to her and that was "thunder and lightning." This she always called "The Weather," and it was this concern of hers in a thunderstorm which made a perpetual joke between Mollie and her enormous son.

Peter Tye, Mollie's only son, was a strapping fellow of six foot four, whose business it was to keep clear and fresh the conduits and ditches of fresh-water, which in that waterless county were the farmers' only means of watering the cattle. On this occupation he was absent sometimes for a week at a time. His habit of being alone had not interfered with the simplicity and light-heartedness of his nature. He set great store by his home and his odd little mother, whom he teased constantly. His chief friend was Henry Jennet, who made a point of looking after the eccentric

Mollie when her big son had to be away for any length of time.

It happened that two days after Mrs. Huniset had received her " insult " from Sam Perry that Henry Jennet thought of his friend Mollie and set off in the evening to visit her. She lived in a cottage of four rooms raised high above the road by a garden full of polyanthus and lady lilies. Peter was planting a row of early potatoes near the cottage, looking as much too big for the strip of ground as he did for the low kitchen when he entered it. There had been a thunderstorm the day before and many stately blooms lay broken and miry on the narrow brick path. Henry Jennet opened the gate (Peter always walked over it) and mounted the three brick steps to the path.

" Isn't that a pity now ? " he said, as he tried to straighten the broken stems.

" Come in," invited Peter, hanging his hoe by the head on the gutter of the cottage and striding over the flower border. As the men entered, Mollie came in from a dark scullery opposite the kitchen door.

"It's gone, Mother," said Peter jocosely. Mollie nodded to Henry and then shut her mouth tight and glanced at her son. Peter laughed and resumed.

"We've had a good laugh all day at Mother !

You see those little feet of hers! Can't get upstairs too often, can they, Mother? Would you believe? She has to put one foot on each stair and then bring the other one up to it before she can get any higher.

"You be quiet," said Mollie.

"So you see," resumed Peter, "rather than go upstairs she leaves her bed till evening, and that saves her a journey."

"Well, what's your head for but to save your heels," said Mollie.

"But last thing," went on Peter undeterred, and putting his big hand over his mouth to smother a chuckle, "she'd put out the lamp down here and she'd got upstairs bit by bitty, as she do, and what did ye do next, Mother?" he asked, not because he wanted information but to prolong the dramatic moment. Mollie's mouth shut tighter. "Was on the landing, wasn't ye, in the pitch dark," asked Peter. "Black as night it was, wasn't it?" Mollie was not to be drawn. "And before she could get at the matches on the window-sill, there was such a rattle-clap of thunder she thought the world was coming to an end, didn't ye, Mother?"

"Didn't I have the candlestick in my hand and wasn't he brass now?" asked Mollie indignantly, "all ready to catch the lightning and take it?"

"Two windows on the landing as well," went on the merciless Peter.

"Every facility, as it says on the railway station. We've got something to laugh at now, haven't we, Mother?"

"You can't ever do without something to laugh at," said Mollie, very well disposed, however, to laugh at herself since it was Peter's joke.

"A trying situation," said Peter. "I saw it on a picture-place that. A trying situation! Beggared if it wouldn't have tried me to be hanging over a precipice by my boot," he added reminiscently.

"Was that what he was doing?" asked Henry, with great interest.

"He was and all. A trying situation," said Peter.

All the world knows the great comfort to be derived from a phrase, and the peasant who would be a wag finds a special satisfaction in its repetition at the appropriate moment. To Peter, living solitary from week to week, such phrases afforded an unusual pleasure, as describing in shorthand, as it were, the lives of his fellow creatures whom he saw at a distance.

Jennet, laughing, made his way to a chair with a red stuff cushion tied on to the seat, and Peter, looking behind him with a view to a chair which

would bear his weight and bulk, caught sight of an incongruous object lying upon it. He pounced upon it with a grin and then laid on the top of the drawers without comment a shapeless straw hat with a ribbon hanging loose from it.

"Mary left it here," said Mollie, opening a drawer with some difficulty and laying the object within. "She's very upsetted. Can't remember what she *do* do."

"It's bad, all that affair," said Peter seriously.

"Yes, it's a sad thing altogether," replied Jennet.

"Betty Betch told *me*," said Peter. "Two or three days ago it was. What do *you* make of it, Henry? Shall we all stand by the old firm, as they say?"

"It's wonderful how soon people fall into a new custom," said Jennet. "Once the *idea's* got into their minds they forget it hasn't been there always. In a week or two they'll be astonished if only one bus turns up at the station."

"Some days there's more than Perry can manage of a market evening," said Peter. "I heard a lot of grumbling at one time when I was down towards the station direction—end of last year it was—Perry had to leave some of 'em on the road and they didn't like it. There was grumbling at one time, I remember."

"I wonder now," said Jennet reflecting. "I

wonder if there's a way out there. I wonder if Turner could be persuaded to run his bus on the two market days and leave the rest of the week to Perry as it used to be."

Peter glanced at Jennet. "Turner wasn't running a bus to be of assistance, was he, Henry?" he asked shrewdly. Jennet's face fell.

"I'm afraid not," he said ruefully.

"The root of the matter's what's wrong," declared Peter. "It's that you must get at if you want it stopped. Get Turner to take back his bet or something, the thing might stop."

"It would come to an end of itself then," assented Jennet.

"Die a natural death," said Peter. "I suppose Ben Crompton——" he broke off; "you don't like him, do you, Henry?"

"I've never had any occasion to *dis*like him," said Henry. "But I *don't* like him for all that. He seems always to have such a hard word for poor Sam. I hope it isn't judging, but I felt he was really pleased that this had occurred. He's a friend of Turner's, I know."

"Birds of a feather," quoted Peter. "But if it was put to him that it *looks* bad, you know. 'Betting our national vice.' I saw that somewhere in the paper. Dersay I could find it again to show him. He might bethink himself it *looked* bad; and then there's Mr. Paul, you know,"

proceeded Peter with animation. "He's such a warm fellow. You can't help feeling better by the look of him. He ain't a fool either," and Peter's expression became a little conscious, as if he had suddenly remembered an occurrence about which he preferred to be silent. Henry Jennet looked at Peter with great affection visible in his face, shadowed a little, too, for Peter was the age of his boy, somewhere astray in the world. His next remark was grave.

"You know, Peter," he began, "it seems as though there's something in an evil idea when it's once let loose in people's minds that works more and more evil as it goes on. I can't get out of my mind an expression I read in a book Mr. Paul once lent me. 'A principle of evil'; That's what it was. It seems as though that evil idea of Bill Turner's is even going to affect the work of a good man like Mr. Paul. Why, I've heard more unkind words spoken of Mr. Paul this last week than I've heard for twenty years. Ben Crompton doesn't like him for one thing and Miss Lydiate feels herself offended (though I'm sure I don't know why) because Mr. Paul went in Perry's bus. She calls it encouraging drunken and irregular ways, and then Sam managed to get himself in Mary Huniset's bad books. Mr. Paul was short with her, too, when she followed him to tell him about Sam's niece having had a child, and

those are the people who talk. People in the wrong are always the first and loudest in talk. It generally comes rightway up in the end, but there's a principle of evil at work now that isn't even going to spare Mr. Paul. Of course, he's a great many friends. We mustn't lose sight of that. Now what did Mr. Paul do on Thursday ? Exactly what he's done all the time he's been coming to Wiat. Took his place in Perry's bus. That's all, and his enemies are doing the rest."

Jennet rose to his feet to take leave as he was talking.

" I don't think anybody'll take much notice of Poll Parrot," said Peter. " She won't say anything against Mr. Paul to me, I can tell you, nor Miss Mim either," and Jennet took his leave.

Chapter 19

BETTY BETCH and Hepzibah Hewlett were close friends. The misdemeanours of Hepzibah in the way of house-cleaning and abiding within doors, which made a small scandal in the village, passed Betty by and Hepzibah, relaxing her vindictiveness as she felt the absence of criticism, allowed herself to be at ease with Betty as with few of her own sex.

Hepzibah having early in her married life settled the axiom that you " never know the size of your belly till your feet's under your own table," took every means suggested by her indefatigable spirit

and resource of making good the deficiencies of wage and opportunity. Morels and peewit's eggs she considered hers by the grace of nature, and one morning at six o'clock she left her cottage in the hollow to visit Betty in her steading on the hill, that she might have Betty's instinct for growing things on her side and company on the way.

She left her dark kitchen with its unlit and uncleaned fireplace and came out of doors. It was like emerging from underground. Hepzibah's garden had been given over to fowls, who make as she often declared " bad gardeners," and was as repulsive as a piece of flat greasy land can be. But within a dozen yards the over-hanging hawthorn covered her with its shade and scent, and the sun, sending its radiance at ease in the wide heavens, already shone warmly within the screened lane. The light was green through the tender beech leaves and merciful to the eyes. The sky was already far away and infinite. No clouds drew it back to earth. It seemed a dome for that mounting and overflowing sun whose heat would soon bring gravity to the day. As Hepzibah left the lane the fields were a vivid green under their springing grass. Dead bees lay about on the ground. The aspen rattled with every sighing of the air. Scents rose from the saturated ground. Voices of birds uttered plaintive, entreating calls. The tiny voices of insects filled the air with their

ceaseless chorus, audible in the profound and virgin stillness of early morning.

Hepzibah reached Betty's cottage and finding the door on the latch entered without ceremony. There was a fire burning, with a kettle on it, which declared to Hepzibah's experienced eye that the mistress would shortly return. A large cockerel was perched on the round three-legged table pecking at the portion of a loaf on a blue plate which, with an egg-cup and a cup and saucer, showed a meal in progress. A blind magpie turned so ceaselessly in its cage that its tail was worn away by constant striking against the bars. Two curtains of cotton with floral borders were flapping outside the open window to the danger of a flower-pot of bluebells on the sill. Hepzibah slapped the cockerel, who flew with a squawk to the floor and began to rummage among the crumbs and potato-peelings set in a bucket for the pig; drew in the curtains and moved the pot of bluebells to the table. As she did so Betty appeared with a cabbage in one hand and two eggs in the other.

"I'd just run down to the roost, to see if they'd laid again this morning and I saw you come in the gate," she said in her sing-song tone. "I was going to make a cup of tea. Is the kettle boiling?" She laid her eggs and the cabbage on the table, peering into the fireplace.

"Boiling a stretched gallop he is," said Hepzibah. "Here," jumping up energetically. "I'll make your tea. I'm going to look for morels and I thought if you'd nothing to do you might come with me." She dropped the kettle back on to the fire with an exclamation, then grasped it again with the corner of her apron and filled the teapot. Betty stood considering.

"Yes, I can come with you—for an hour—I don't think we shall get many—it's getting late—though I did get some a day or two ago—I'll go with you to Old Man's Wood and then I've to go on to Allerford Hill."

With her customary alertness Hepzibah poured out the tea while Betty still stood by the table; wiping her hands, which were damp from the dew on the grass.

"What a woman you are for quickness," she said with admiration. "I never saw anyone so decided—living alone I go my own time, and have nobody to please."

"I haven't," said Hepzibah. "You drink up your tea now or we shan't catch the tide."

Betty walked over and sank down obediently into a chair which she did not even draw up to the table. She had a habit of considering such furniture as she possessed to be as much fixtures in the place in which they stood as the doorstep or the window-sill, and of accommodating herself

to them. It was this habit which caused Hepzibah to affirm that Betty indoors was as restless as a "little toad on a tater-ridge" and only a possible companion out of doors. Remembering that she had come to look for fungi before the sun was too hot, she drank one cup of tea hurriedly and poured out another cup.

"How do you spell out the history of this old bus?" she asked her friend.

"Oh, what a pity," said Betty, forgetting to drink her tea. "I could hardly have thought it of Mr. Turner."

"Hog-eared!" declared Hepzibah decidedly. "That's what *he* is. If he's said a thing aloud you can't turn him. Men's a lot more obstinate than women, you know. Look at Robert now. That niece of his went and got married at sixteen. Never spoke to her since. 'Whatever good did you get out of *that*?' I says to him sometimes. 'I don't care, it oughtn't to be encouraged,' he says. But he wouldn't speak, for all that, and never did do. Never spoke to her again, he didn't, and she went to America after all, so he didn't get no satisfaction out of it, either. 'Well, wasn't you silly over Clara?' I says to him sometimes, when I wants to make the pains come on. 'It's no business to be encouraged,' he says, and you can't get no more out of him. Less he'll say, but more he will not say. It's the same about

borrowing. I shall never forget when we was first married. 'Don't you never let me see you borrow nothing,' he says. Well, there was a woman living in that cottage where the shepherd lives now—she borrowed from morning till night, I do declare she did. Monday morning first thing she was on the doorstep, and upon my word if she wasn't there last thing Saturday night. She never had nothing in the house. That wouldn't suit me, it wouldn't. Why, half your money's gone on Saturday paying back what you've borrowed. But this woman she came in on a Tuesday to borrow the washing tub and a saucepan, and Robert was hoeing mangolds in the field. She'd come into the scullery and I'd rinsed out the washing tub when I saw Robert jump clean over the hedge. Cleared it he did like a little partridge. Straight into the scullery he come and first he took her and then he took me by the shoulders and turned us both out of doors. Then he locked the door and threw the key over the hedge. Never found it again, we didn't, though *we* looked and the children looked. Never saw that key again and we had to get a new one made for that door. Never said nothing, mind you. Just took us both by the shoulders and turned us out of doors. He looked a bit silly at night when we had to take the pick to get into the house, but, however, 'If ever I see that woman in my

house again I'll do the same,' that's all he said. We have many a laugh at it now. But all Robert says is, 'I'd do it again.' Never says he was wrong. All men's hog-eared, and that's what's wrong with sweet William Turner. But look here, Bet, this and earlier might do but this and later would be awful. I want to find some morels just to show Mr. Robert he's wrong for once. 'You won't find none—You'll have to grow 'em if you does,' he says, and offs with him and outs."

"He's wrong," said Betty, unpinning her skirt, which was tucked up out of the way of her feet, and shaking it into decorum again. "It was only yesterday I saw them, but don't expect many. Well, Maggie, good-bye," and she moved the magpie's cage to a shelf away from the window.

"If there should be a cat—there is sometimes —I don't think she could reach Maggie there, but it's well to be careful, it would be such a cruel thing—since she's blind."

"Is it any good keeping the poor creature?" asked Hepzibah. "I expect you're too meek-hearted to wring its neck, but I know *I* should."

"You like people to think you a great deal more hard-hearted than you are," said Betty, pulling at the door, which characteristically hung askew and had to be humoured. Hepzibah jerked the latch and the door being finally secured, the two women left the house, leaving with it the

incurable poverty of their lives for the riches of the country in the springtime.

Both had a keen zest for the freedom and beauty of the morning. The first sunshine came undefiled from its fountain and blazed in a thousand sanctuary lamps of dew. The ineffable light of early morning lay on the pasture a hundred feet below as they left the wood behind them. The groups of beasts feeding had the sobriety of a monument, the trees' shadow lay like a dial on the ground and even the women walking in the lane had the gravity of pilgrims in that radiant and living light. As the sunshine spread it absorbed the cool moisture of the night and its shadows, and within the wood there were already shafts of light entering the dewy shade. The early wild creatures went about their affairs unsuspicious of strangers within their sanctities. A hare who had left her form came three times within the grasp of the women as they bent looking for morels. A stoat slid, a bright streak across the wood-path. A jay flew scolding and two squirrels sat with tails erect, watching. Behind a beech-tree in the wood an old man was sitting with his spotted handkerchief spread on the ground beside him containing his day's food. The piece of bread and cheese he would eat at the twelve o'clock halt. Just now he was munching his bread and bacon, biting the bread at the

corner of his mouth and twisting it from the hunk to spare his front teeth, which were faulty. It never occurs to any countryman working out of doors to make known his presence any more than it does to a bird or a stoat, nor does he think it necessary to restrain his curiosity or close his eyes to any novelty which appears within his sight any more than they ; and old Billy Bawtrey watched with both eyes and a spice of mischief the approach of the two women. With their own eyes searching the ground they drew very near to the motionless old rustic upon whose face there slowly quivered a grin. With a stealthy, grimy hand he reached for a broken branch lying within reach and with a soundless chuckle threw it adroitly at Hepzibah's feet.

" Good gracious ! " she exclaimed with a shriek, and then looking quickly for the reason of the stick, she spied the grinning and delighted face of Billy Bawtrey looking round the tree.

" You may as well kill anybody as frighten them like that ! " she scolded.

" Made you jump, didn't I ? " grinned the unabashed old Puck. " Oh, good gracious, you sings out, didn't you ? "

" I'll sing out something else if you tries any more tricks," said Hepzibah.

" Oh, good gracious ! " squeaked the impenitent Billy.

Hepzibah turned her back in dudgeon.

" Seed old Bill Turner bringing a horse home from the fair yesterday," volunteered the old man.

" What are *you* talking about a fair ? Never was no fair I heard of yesterday. 'Twas too wet," said Hepzibah.

" Tail all plaited up, wudn't it ? Had No. 1 on his tail, 'adn't he ? Ain't that a fair then ? What else is it ? You tell me what else that wur but a fair. *Wheer* it wus is all another case. Joey, he said he'd been all the way to Isted, but I don't know if he knowed anything about it. Getting an old man, old Joey."

" Don't see many golden curls of your own," said Hepzibah.

" Old Joey, he's five years—he's *ten* years older'n me," protested the old man. " Red in the face I wus shouting to him. Gone all deaf, he has. Older'n me he is a lot. Said old Bill Turner'd gone to Isted, but I don't know how he knowed about it. Don't know much, old Joey, but Bill Turner's got a horse all right, for I seed it."

" Pity he's got a bus," said Hepzibah.

" 'Tis a pity all right," assented Billy. " I ain't going to use it," he added to make clear his moral position. A short laugh from Hepzibah was his answer.

"He'd a been a rich man by now if he'd a depended on you," she said.

"No, I don't go much to Wiat," said Billy ruminating, "but if I'd been given a sovereign everytime I walked down Bob's Lane it's me would have been rich, not Bill Turner. Up and down all hours of the day and night too, I been for sixty years to my knowledge. What old Bill Turner wants is an enemy," went on Billy. "So's he can't be 'lowed to have it all his own way."

It was clear to the two women that the enemy was not imagined by Billy in the sense of the Scripture, but such a mischievous Puck as himself who would make things more difficult for the misdemeanant and incidentally more amusing for the onlooker.

"Wants Marky," suggested Hepzibah.

"Won't do to take no wheels off old Bill's trap," said the old man. He grinned slowly as at some tasty memory.

"You've tried it somewhere," suggested Hepzibah.

"No, *I* ain't tried it," said Billy, and then with sudden acrimony added, "Can't stop talking, women! Never can get nothing done with women about! Ain't ate my breakfast yet, lolloping and talking!"

"He wants his teeth for his bacon, Bet," said Hepzibah. "We'll put the wood between us.

Might bite us," and picking up her basket with her usual vigour she stumped away, followed by Bet and regarded sourly by Billy, who muttered "lolloping and talking" and turned over his bacon to see if there was mustard on the other side.

Chapter 20

THE flush of temper faded from Billy's round face, ill-fashioned to entertain such an expression, and as he gnawed his bacon and bread the former appearance of mischievous cunning returned. He chuckled several times and once laughed noiselessly until he was red to the temples. Pity it would be to miss any sport that was going. Old Joey, now, he went to the Buck every night very nearly. Saw everything. Might be something going on and him none the wiser. Sour old fellow, Bill Turner. Minded him of Farmer Oldcastle, only he was red-headed. "Lantern 'ead" he used to be called by the boys. He remembered a string across the road and Farmer Oldcastle being legged down. Do old Bill Turner good to be legged down. He wasn't in it himself. Fifth of November was the best time. Plenty of people about. Fifth of Novembers wasn't what they used to be like. Nothing was like what it used to be. People gets more money and they gets less privileges. Old Bill Turner—no doing of him—found a halfpenny in the garden, and polished of it up. 'Twasn't just like another halfpenny but

'twas of a size. Old Bill he wouldn't have nothing to say to it. "Bad halfpenny," says he, "Can't take it." "Looks to me very like." "'Tisn't like," says he, "Where's Queen Vittoria?" Wouldn't take it, he wouldn't. Disobliging, that's him! Legging-down do 'im good. Want's an enemy, old Bill! Where's them women? Ain't no good to tell nothing to women. Tell-tale-tit, tongue shall be slit. His daughter, she wouldn't let him go to the public if she could help. Old Joey, he went every night. Ain't got no daughter, old Joey.

Billy, having finished his bread and bacon, wiped his mouth with his hand and rolled up the bread and cheese in his handkerchief. Quite a number of interesting things required watching before his work occurred to him, and with great deliberation he raised his fag-hook to return to his occupation of clearing the undergrowth.

Chapter 21

THE week following, the weather was dry and gloomy, a good time for loosening and thinning the serpent-like weed which chokes the cattle-ditches, and Peter, his broad back stooping over a cross drain and his leather-gaitered legs astride, was twisting his long sickle-shaped hook in the squelching mass at the bottom of the ditch when the flop of some object in the water behind him caused him to turn round and examine the widening rings of water.

" 'Twasn't no frog that ! " he decided, " more like a stone. Billy's about somewhere, I know. He'll come out when he wants to and if he don't want to, he can stay where he is." He twisted the handle again, bending it this way and that with all the weight of his powerful body, among the tenacious and clinging streamers so pliable and yielding within the oozing water. In a few seconds a stone fell in front of him, hitting the hook's handle as it fell. Peter straightened himself up and brought both legs to one side of the ditch.

" Who's mucking up as fast as I clears ? " he demanded in a loud voice. " You come out,

Billy." No one was visible, and either Billy waited for a dramatic moment or was in dudgeon at his discovery. No one answered. Peter gave a comprehensive glance round. "Behind that old juniper, that's where you'll find Billy," he observed aloud and bent over the ditch again, this time keeping both legs on one side ready to give chase should occasion arise. In this position it was easy to glance below his elbow and in a few moments he saw Billy Bawtrey slip with many precautions from behind the juniper, and with a short run reach quite another part of the meadow, from which he now, without any attempt at secrecy, was preparing to appear within Peter's view.

"Beggared if that old fellow *can* do a thing straight!" said Peter, who saw it all. "Hullo, Billy!" he greeted the new-comer.

"What did you shy those stones at me for?"

"I ain't shied no stones," said Billy. "'Twas a frog. You can't tell no difference. Frogs makes as much splashing as a stone."

"'Twasn't a frog hit my hook-handle, was it? What was you doing behind that juniper bush?"

"Can't *see* straight," observed Billy in a detached manner. "Didn't you see where I come from? Ain't no juniper bushes in the medder, is there?"

" I cannot tell a lie, papa ; I cannot tell a lie," chanted Peter.

" Can't talk proper ! " said Billy disdainfully. " Don't know how yet ! Does you get paid for that there job what you does ? " he asked severely. Peter stared. " Cause you better get on doing what you's paid for," observed Billy.

" All right ! I'll get on when you get off," responded Peter unperturbed. He scooped up a mass of slippery weed and flung it on the bank. Billy regarded it with deep interest. He stared from the weeds to the bottom of the ditch, muddy now and sending up bubbles to the surface. So rapt was his contemplation that Peter was tempted to try again.

" Beggared if he ain't asleep. Oh, put me in my little bed ! as the saying is," he sang.

" Some people's got more talk than sense," confided Billy to the ditch. " Ain't much water there," he observed irrelevantly.

" No," replied Peter. " If we don't get rain in this next fortnight I don't know how it'll be, I'm sure. I've seen it as low once before since I've been here, but only once."

" People oughtn't to go using water when it's so scarce," said Billy. " My granddaughter, she says, ' When did you wash your face, granfer ? ' ' People didn't ought to wash their faces so often, I says. ' 'Tis wasteful,' I says. 'Always washing

themselves, women! Shameful waste! The pump'll go dry with all that washing.'"

"It'll take more than washing *your* face to dry up the pump," said Peter.

"Old Bill Turner, he messes and washes his bus," volunteered Billy. "Eerd talking about it, I did. Never had no washing of carts nor no buses that *I* ever heard of before. Sam Perry, he washes in his own pond. Taking water for the horses' drink now, I've eerd of 'em doing that, but never no washing of buses."

Peter straightened himself.

"He won't go on long," he said. "My word, but it's sufferin' hot in this meadow!" He pushed back his cap. "'Tisn't legal that. Can't use the pump on the green for that sort of work. Somebody'll up and stop him before long."

"Does you *know* that to be the case?" asked Billy shrewdly. "It ain't legal, you says, for him to go washing of his old bus in the green pump?"

"No," said Peter. "He won't be allowed to do that long. Against the law is that. Anybody could tell you that."

"Oh," commented Billy, and relapsed into his former contemplation of the ditch, now in a swirl of mud under Peter's vigorous dragging. Peter examined the squat, clownish old rustic.

"He ain't asked me that for nothing," he

commented within himself. "He's never come all this way for no reason."

"I'm going along now," said Billy suddenly. "You get on with your work, young Peter."

"Where's *your* work all this time?" said Peter.

"I've been in awful pain all this week," said Billy offended. "Hagony pain, I've been in. Master come along this morning to get me to go to work. 'Look at me!' I says. 'I'm in hagony pain. I ain't fit to work,' I says, 'awful pain I'm in. 'Tain't fit for an old man in pain to be working,' I says to him."

Peter guffawed loudly. Bill turned his back without a word, his short legs, set down wide apart and in his most determined manner to show his disdain, giving to his square body the lurches of an eccentric tub on difficult waters.

Chapter 22

IT would not be a matter of astonishment to anyone who had been privy to the old man's thoughts during his work in the daytime and his many pauses therein, to be told that the first visitor to the Buck that same evening was Billy Bawtrey, his legs as wide apart as ever and his eyes alight for any sport that might be going. On the way there he had met Mr. Paul, to whom he had volunteered so much wordy and fallacious information—going to see his granddaughter to advise her about the pig—going to fetch a gallon of seed-potatoes—that Mr. Paul said laughing.

"Don't have too many, Billy."

"Don't get nothing at my granddaughter's," the old man had replied, with resentful suspicion. "A very sober man her husband. Goes to

chapel!" he added, with a little flare of vindictiveness. "It don't do to let him know too much," he said to himself, as he watched Mr. Paul out of sight before turning in to the door of the Buck i' th' Vine. "He might happen to meet my granddaughter."

Hepzibah Hewlett was accustomed to say that the door of the Buck i' th' Vine was the only door through which Billy Bawtrey passed without pulling faces first. The swinging door creaked on his heels as though he had been caught in a trap and John Fryatt turned round, both hands still above his head grasping the heavy pewter measure he had just placed on the highest shelf.

"Hullo, Billy," he greeted his customer with a spice of mischief if not of derision in his tone. Now Billy, with the alertness to know whether he was "being made game of" always upmost in his mind, resented John Fryatt's familiarity and stumped with dignity to a chair, from which he immediately rose to try another.

"Ain't ye got chairs that a person can get into?" he asked with acerbity. "Pinches me, that one. Can't hardly get out of him, he holds me so tight. Big enough for children might be, but 'tisn't big enough for menkind."

John settled his tankard and turned round, watching Billy trying chair after chair.

"Queer soft sort of weather this for May-day,"

he observed good-humouredly. " It seems more like April weather."

" And so *'tis* April weather," said Billy, who had settled in an enormous wooden arm-chair which stood near the chimney. " My old mother she didn't hold with all that altering the times of year. Every year she used to say. ' Now what did I tell you ! You can alter the almanack as much as you like,' she said, ' but you won't alter the weather to fit en,' she says. ' You ain't going to have 1st of May weather on the 23rd of April. You see if you doos. You'll have 23rd of April weather and no other.' She wasn't a believer in it at all," continued Billy, " and you see how it is now. 'Tis the first of May by the almanack and 'tis the 23rd of April by the weather."

Three men entered at that moment and the door had hardly closed behind them than it opened to admit two others. John Fryatt was too busy to attend to Billy. The pulling of handles, rattling of money and pulling of chairs to tables went on uninterrupted for some minutes. For a while there was a self-conscious silence. Then on the entrance of two other customers, those already seated felt themselves habitués and the talk began. The presence of Billy Bawtrey was too good an occasion for an opening of the conversation.

" What's the date to-day, Billy ? " asked one man.

"First of May, isn't it?" said another with a wink. Billy was not to be drawn.

"You ain't seen Jerry Greenwood, I suppose?" he demanded. "I come down here to see him. I ain't often got so much time to spare talking, but I got something important on my mind. I can't stay too long," he added.

"Your Peggy'll come and fetch ya, won't she?" asked a labourer, turning round from the bar against which he leant. Billy preserved a sour silence. John Fryatt interposed his conviction that Jerry would be in soon because he had undertaken to let him know his opinion of a set of harness for sale among the other property at Windor Farm.

"What's that about something important?" began the labourer.

"Here's Jerry," said Fryatt at the same moment.

"Usual," said Jerry to Fryatt, as he stood with his hand on the bar handle. Fryatt pulled on the instant and passed a frothing mug across the counter. Jerry took a pull, wiped his mouth and with a long "Ah—h," sat down by chance just opposite Billy, who said:

"A lot of loitering goes on now-a-days. Nobody hurries themselves. Thinks people can wait all day, they do. I bin along seeing Peter Tye. I've taken lots of trouble—had a lot of

walking to do over this affair." Jerry winked at John, who thereupon drew another mug of ale.

"Better have a drink with all that walking and talking," said Jerry. Serenity spread like a sun over the whole countenance of Billy. The grins of the others were unseen by the eyes which regarded with complete satisfaction the inside of the mug only. When he emerged from his drink with sighs of content and breathlessness his self-importance had returned.

"Peter Tye is paid good money for looking after the water?" he demanded.

"Certainly," assented Jerry.

"Then he ought to know about it, seeing he doos it?" asked Billy.

"Certainly," repeated Jerry.

"Well, what Peter he says is just this," said Billy, having the attention now of the whole room. "What he says is this: 'When old Bill Turner gets washing of his cart at the pump, you just goes for him. 'Tisn't legal,' he says, 'that's what it isn't. Bill Turner'll have to be told about that. Can't be too perticler about that sort of thing and water so scarce as it is. Can't be 'lowed,' he says."

"Seed him at it as I come along," volunteered a man from the corner.

"'Tis for drinking purposes, that pump," said Jerry.

"I heerd Mary Huniset going on at him to-

night," said the man from the corner, stretching out a leg, " she rather favours Turner's side, only she wanted water for her pigs' meal and there he was splashing away. Told her she could go and carry water from the ditches. That's what *that* was for. She said he hadn't no right to take away water. ' Who's going to stop me ? ' he says."

At that moment a woman's voice was heard at the door and at the sound Billy Bawtrey rose, but not before the owner of the voice had opened the door and entered, and a rosy good-natured woman brought a breeze of air among the men.

" There's no living with you, granfer," she said good-humoured and scornful. " How far have I to walk after you now ? Come along home with you. Don't you want your supper ? "

Billy arose with a great show of dignity.

" I ain't no time to spare talking," he said to the men. " Old Joey now, he don't do nothing *but* talking. Don't do no work to speak of. I ain't got so much time to stop talking as he has." A burst of laughter followed this declaration, which became a little self-conscious as the woman turned round, having steered the old man through the door, and called back to them.

" Don't you get laughing at Granfer, all you. Your time's coming before long. Somebody'll be laughing at you yet. Wait till you gets old and childish."

Chapter 23

IT was clear, then, that the rival bus was established in Wiat and it was not long before it became equally apparent that it would be run with the underlying and sinister persistence which had led to its beginning. There was nothing easy-going about Turner, as everyone knew and some few began to dread, and there would be no half measures about his manner of conducting his new and malicious venture. Some, indeed, spoke openly in admiration of his punctuality and efficiency. "Well! he does it very well, you know." The bus, too, instead of being cleaned when it could hardly be avoided, was kept invariably bright, and this made for favour in the eyes of the women. The air of contemptuous defiance with which Turner had first driven his bus within the square had given place to a confident superciliousness. At times his third son, Albert, would accompany his father, standing on the step of the bus after the manner of a town conductor. He would drop from the step before the bus had stopped and open the door, deciding often the fate of any uncertain passenger. He became alert to catch the eye of

a woman entering the square, would even advance a short way to relieve her of any bundle she might be carrying, while Bill Turner, with a great coat and his brown-leather leggings ("quite the gentleman") stowed away in the boot the weekly increase of parcels and packages confided to him for carriage. Perry, with his old green-black coat patched on the shoulder with cloth of a different colour, and his nonchalant manners, began to be looked upon with disfavour by many. Miss Lydiate had been heard to say that Perry's old coat smelt of his horse. She believed he used it as a horse-cloth after wet weather. New-comers would make for Turner's bus, brightly-painted and briskly attended.

Mr. Paul came and went with Perry as his custom had always been. He wished a good-morning to Turner as he passed—a greeting which was at first returned and then as carefully avoided by a noisy absorption in affairs. But it was not long before the simpler people who had travelled by Turner's bus became aware that competence does not always mean amiability and when they began to look in some confusion at the behaviour of their smart driver. Perry, for instance, had always been willing to stop for a few minutes at any given place on the road if there were time, to allow a basket to be given into the very hands of the person who would meet the bus at that point.

He would drive you along the road a little past the village on a wet day and if you lived within reasonable distance, and no other passenger objected, he would even drive you to your door and hand your parcels out to you. There was no shouting at you and no tart words about the slowness of them old women, and no grinning of a sharp little boy.

Then, too, there began to be visible on the part of Turner, a disposition to small tyrannies. If he saw a passenger standing on one side of the village street it was his pleasure to draw up on the opposite side, or even further down the pavement. If a passenger had travelled by Turner's bus in the morning, that man or woman was given to understand that it must be by the same bus that the return journey must be made at night. Women often alighted at Wiat flushed and indignant, and wordy disputes were heard at the station between Turner and the men who resented his brow-beating. "I can't do with such nonsense!" declared many a flustered country woman, thinking regretfully of the more pliable and accommodating Perry. It was not long before a further incident swung the pendulum of public opinion toward Sam Perry's side.

Chapter 24

IT was on the Wednesday night on which Mr. Paul visited Wiat and at the hour when the train by which he usually journeyed drew within the station. The night was almost like a solid thing in its blackness, as if, entering it, one must bend one's head to avoid a heavy swathing substance which would suffocate and strangle one. The rain had a deliberate striking slant which seemed wholly evil in its intent. The station lights, streaming and intermittent in the gusts of wind, yet seemed, in their blotted and tremulous being, a haven indeed from the damaging menace of the elements beyond them.

Mr. Paul was what the country people called a "clever" man, stalwart, warm-blooded, with ample lungs and heart. The three-mile walk in that weather held no fears.

"Well, well! What a night!" he exclaimed cheerfully to the solitary porter.

"Only Turner out to-night, Sir," with evident delight at the prospect of tongues in warfare. Mr. Paul, divining the man's anticipation, laughed.

"He'll take me up, I suppose?" he asked, with a quick mischievous glance at the man.

"Can't say, Sir, I'm sure," he returned. "Seems a pity to come out on a night like this and not take anybody—even you, Sir!" he added aside.

"Well, well! We'll see if his heart's better than he knows," rejoined Mr. Paul.

"'T'won't be his heart that pulls him, it'll be his pocket," said the porter.

"We shall see! We shall see," said Mr. Paul, grasping his handbag and walking down the platform with feet that made no shuffling as they trod, but rang briskly as the tread of a soldier marching. No other passenger alighted at that wayside station at that time of night. Turner was sheltering under the eaves of the goods siding, looking at the passengers' platform. As he saw the minister emerge from the dusky shadow into the light thrown by the open door of the waiting-room, he came swiftly from his shelter, jumped on the box of his covered fly and, taking the reins, drove off at full speed, to be hidden in an instant by the rain and night. The expression of his face scarcely seemed to change. Neither triumph nor eagerness was visible on his lean countenance. His action was so definite that it appeared premeditated. It seemed the act of a man so consumed by a fell purpose that it acted without

prompting as one of the mainsprings of his conduct. The porter, watching the minister, saw him pause and then break into a hearty laugh. He approached.

"He doesn't want your company to-night, Mr. Paul," he said.

"Evidently not," replied the minister.

"Narrer fellow!" said the man in some disgust. "It looks as if he come out a purpose to do it, it do, indeed, upon my word."

Mr. Paul saddened. "I'm afraid he thinks that I've given him provocation," he said. "Well, I hardly expected anyone to-night, so I'm no worse off really, but it's sad to see a man so completely possessed by an evil spirit."

"One thing, Sir," said the man. "I've never known Bill Turner turn his back on a sixpence before."

"He's left it in the road, this time," said Mr. Paul. "Good-night, John," and Mr. Paul, with the same alert tread, but with head bent to avoid the blinding rain which lashed across his face, vanished within the dark road.

"Old Bill'll get jolly wet on top of his bus anyway," said the porter, turning into the shed again. "Serve him right, too, old skinflint."

Mr. Paul meanwhile was facing the rain-raked

road. His head bent to meet the exigencies of the storm, he saw nothing beyond the yard or two of roadway in front of him. At times he thought he heard in the distance the sound of Turner's retreating wheels, but the rain presently shut him into his own thoughts, which grew sadder as he thought of this strife into the midst of which he had been drawn. At first the sense of humour so quick in his nature had roused him to amusement in the rivalry; but now he saw (since he himself had just been hurt by that very purpose which was directed against Perry) the evil that had taken possession of the quarrel. His heart became heavy. He blamed himself for having alienated the hard, avaricious nature of Turner at the outset, Perry being in any case the easier to gain over to peace. He began to accuse himself of lack of wisdom in the Lord's service. His brain had overcome his heart and in such a case his Christianity must suffer. It was never safe to trifle with passions. Who would have suspected the power of rancour and hate beneath the narrow grasping nature of Turner? After all, unjust though the quarrel was, it was the peace-makers whom Jesus blessed, not the dealers of justice. He must try to repair the breach as best he could. In Turner the passion of hatred was at white heat, and the hatred was now

directed against himself also as a person who persisted in helping Perry. It would be useless at present to try to influence Turner, but perhaps he could persuade Perry to some other line of carrying.

Chapter 25

IT was not only Billy Bawtrey, but many other men who visited Peter Tye in the course of the next week, and on Thursday the outward condition of Turner's bus aroused the liveliest interest. The number of men who sauntered without apparent purpose into the square and past the Crown and Cushion before whose door the bus was drawn up might itself have awakened comment. Winks were exchanged as greetings and broad grins as responses, and when Jerry Greenwood delivered his judgment ten minutes after the buses had started, it was to an audience satisfied of its accuracy.

"Wheels ud do for me, but I reckon they won't for Turner," he said.

"He'll be down all right to-night."

"Gee up, Ben! So long, Jerry," said a carter who had reined in to listen. "Sport to-night," and at the word the men dispersed in different directions.

When, within the hour, a drenching rain began to fall it was as if, with it, one thought had descended upon the fields, stable, roofs and shops of Wiat. "Nothing doing to-night, I fancy."

When Bob Jermy, the ploughboy at Rushes, saw Joe Privett carrying faggots on his shoulder to the stack at the far side of the copseand shouted, leaning his weight on the shaft and looking over his horse's head-brass, "Too wet, Joe," his allusion was entirely grasped by Joe, who under the steadying burden of brushwood answered without raising his head, "Feared so," and disappeared.

Throughout the day there was no cessation of that steady rain nor any variation of the grey folded sky. The ground, so long without water, sucked at the moisture. Ditches became noisy, trees so saturated that to be beneath them meant but a heavier shower. The unvaried rain brought the sound of wind within the airless fields where the cattle, dispirited, and with a steaming mist accompanying them where they gathered beneath hedges and trees, waited patiently for nightfall. At the close of the afternoon, the rain fell faster than the earth could drink and the whole country seemed full of echoes. All the noises which escaping water could make were shrill in the air.

With so sufficient a supply of water coming as it were to the door without having to be carried, the opportunity for swilling yards and pavements was too good to be overlooked and the sound of brushing and scouring and the splashing of water from rain-water buckets was added to the noise of

the rain. An occasional gleam of light with the promise of sunshine within it, lifted the sky in places.

"Going to clear up," said one person after another, and a universal air of business was apparent in the village as of people overtaking work. There was a busy hour at the shop which had been so empty all day that the girl had produced a substantial rolled-up ball of crochet edging for display in the shop-window. The two postmen appeared with red, damp faces and dripping mackintosh capes, hitching their bags underneath and unbuckling them with stiff, cold fingers. To everyone's astonishment there was a sound of heavy wheels rapidly driven, and Turner's bus swung quickly round the corner toward the green. Hepzibah Hewlett was waiting in the shop for half-a-pound of ham to be cut.

"Well, ain't he artful?" she exclaimed. "Gone down 'fore the men's away from work! He ain't gone down before the women, though, *that* he ain't! I'll come back again for that," she said to the girl, and ran out holding up her skirts from the wet.

"You nip up and get your water while it's not raining," she said to every woman she passed as she herself "nipped" along to her cottage, emerging in two minutes with a bucket and a saucepan. She held the saucepan by the handle

as if it were a club and the bucket jangled in her hurry as if it shared her excitement. As she turned on to the village green which lay behind the houses instead of in their midst, she saw Turner alighting from his bus and drawing the horse a little past the pump that he might wash the vehicle with greater convenience. It was then that Hepzibah "nipped" to some purpose, for she had her bucket hanging by the head of the pump before Turner had become aware of her approach. From the other side of the green three other women hurried, and Mary Huniset, whose cottage had a garden on to the green, came out to her back door and seeing the gathering at the pump seized a bucket and hurried down the garden path. Hepzibah pumped with great deliberation until the women came up.

"Give me hold of the handle, Mrs. Hall," she said to the first. "I'll soon fill it for you. No use of us all getting splashed," and she filled the second bucket very slowly. Bill Turner seemed absorbed in removing such parts of the bus as might be damaged by a sousing. As Hepzibah called to the third woman for her bucket he turned toward her, but without definitely addressing her, and said in a bullying tone:

"Hurry up now, you women. You can't keep everybody waiting in a public place."

The woman called Mrs. Hall flushed red and

answered sharply, " We've as much right here as you have."

Hepzibah smiled and pumped very slowly. She observed to the others. " I never knew a baker so fond of water before. Regular fire-spaniels, I thought they was." The women laughed and looked aside at Turner.

" Now then," said he, coming deliberately towards Hepzibah, " give me that handle. You can do your chattering when I've gone."

" That I shan't do," said Hepzibah, " neither chattering nor nothing else. You've no right here washing carts. Tain't for that they put pumps. You go along to the pond and wash your cart like other people. I ain't going to give you no handle, you can bet your bob or your hat either, if you want to."

" This pump's for house-water—'tisn't for washing carts," said Mrs. Hall.

" It's for what it's going to be used for," said Turner truculently. " Let go of that handle now." Hepzibah pumped on.

" I'll let go when I've a mind to, and that's when," she said. " You haven't got a right to wash carts at the pump. Ask Peter Tye."

Turner moved a step or two and taking his horse's bridle backed the bus right on top of Mrs. Hall, who sprang aside only just in time to avoid being knocked down. The other women stepped

back. Hepzibah stood her ground, being safe behind the pump-handle. The cart could not very well knock down the village pump. Her whole short little person was ready for battle. Mrs. Hall slowly retreated carrying her pail full of water. She had not her neighbour's appetite for a scrimmage. Mrs. Huniset slackened her approach and stood with eyes gleaming. Hepzibah's mouth almost disappeared, so rigidly did she compress it. An ugly and contemptuous smile appeared on Turner's face. He became noisier in his movements with the bus. Seizing a bucket which the wheel had knocked over he threw it aside roughly.

"That ain't your bucket, is it?" said Hepzibah, while the woman to whom it belonged picked it up with an indignant face. Turner looked at her disdainfully.

"I'm not a woman to spend all day clacking my tongue," he said. "Clear off, the lot of you. You can come back when I've done. I'm in a hurry."

"Well I never, he ain't a woman, he's a man," jeered Hepzibah. "Ain't he patting himself on the back about it. Did you ever see one before, Alice? He's a man! I'd have a good look at him, if I was you—Here's Poll Lydiate, too"—she raised her voice—"come to have a look at a man. She can't get ne'er a one to look at her."

Miss Lydiate retreated quickly. "She don't like the look of him now she sees him," said Hepzibah laughing loudly. "No, you don't," she shrieked as Turner laid his hand on the pump-handle, removing her own. "You touch me if you dare, Bill Turner. Who do you think you are, knocking people about? You ain't such a treat as we can't bear to lose you. You leave me a-be! If you touches me—" To Hepzibah an idea no sooner occurred than it was acted upon. She saw the bucket which Turner had hung on the spout of the pump and into which he was slowly and contemptuously pumping. It was at that moment full. She slipped nimbly round and with both hands lifted it. For a moment she balanced it and then with an adroit tilt pitched its contents over the unsuspecting Turner.

"He's ate too many of his own buns. He wants a cooling mixture," she said, laughing coarsely.

Turner stood a moment, then with a malignant expression shook himself, jumped to the box of his bus, and without a look at the women who were laughing derisively, drove away swiftly from the green.

Chapter 26

IT was Peter Tye who gave the first account of the quarrel round the pump to Mr. Paul, overtaking him on his way to Wiat. As Mr. Paul parted company from him, pausing a moment to watch that magnificent figure leap easily and lightly across the swollen ditches in the meadow, an affectionate smile lingered on his face. "A fine fellow! A fine fellow!" said the older man, and waved his stick as Peter, in a sideways leap, caught sight of the watching figure and waved his hand. In a moment he was hidden by the steep bank and Mr. Paul, descending from the stile, entered the screening lane, where hedges rose above banks so high that the sky was almost hidden. Mr. Paul walked on alone very thoughtfully. Once or twice he smiled at the recollection of Hepzibah and her pail of water, but his mind was soon occupied by the quarrel and the dimensions which it promised to assume. He must take care not to add fuel to the fire by officious interference, but he could not rest content that he had done all that lay in his power. He reviewed the situation once more.

For opinion Turner had the open support of

Crompton and Miss Lydiate; with the rest of the village it was a matter of convenience. Public sympathy was undoubtedly with Perry, and Henry Jennet with himself had expressed decided opinions upon the justice of the whole affair. To endeavour to placate was out of the question now. The quarrel which had been taken up, he was convinced, as much in jest by the publican and his friends as in sober intention, threatened to become a feud and a scandal. There was no use closing one's eyes to the fact that while this quarrel absorbed the entire thoughts of the people any further usefulness of his own for his Master was blocked, as it were, in the fairway. Here was an obstacle thrown by the powers of evil to hinder the Master's work. It was not a question now of his own sensibility or dislike of interference. He could not, he *ought* not, to disregard this challenge and defiance of his Master. Turner must be appealed to with all the sympathy that he could find. His better nature must be taken by storm and appealed to. His narrow unloving spirit must be coerced by the warmth of the Saviour's love. And how was he, Enoch Paul, to stand in the day of the Lord if he could find no flame of his Master's love for those who were going astray. "If ye love them that love you, what thank have ye?" He had taken so much from his Lord. How often did he come at night

with the same faults uncorrected. How often he had lamented his hasty temper and his lack of love before his Lord, and had his Lord turned from him? Did *His* love fail? Did *He* forget to be gracious for all His servant's lack? How came *he* then, Enoch Paul, a sinner, to judge the faults of others for whom Jesus died? Let him take humble and ardent care that the likeness of his Lord within his own life be not so defaced that His disciple could not be recognised. When his Lord returned let it be to say "Well done." There was no lack in the Lord's bounty. "He is able to make *all* grace *abound* towards *all* men, that ye, having all *sufficiency* in *all* things may *abound* unto *every* good work." Mr. Paul smiled as he thought what a good text that would be for a sermon. It seemed as though the language of the Apostle could hardly *contain* the idea of the Saviour's abundant grace within itself. It was bursting out everywhere. When he had finished his sermon on the Philippian jailer he would begin another on the abundant grace of God. And was that grace nothing to him, Enoch Paul, so many years a disciple of the Lord? Did it not seek him and constrain him? Had it not been about him all his life? Had he ever known it to come short? Had it not always exceeded his expectations? "Be ye wise as serpents." There was no question

then as to his duty, nay, his thankful pleasure in this matter. It behoved him only to see that no personal prejudice of his own hindered the Lord's work. It would be better to approach Crompton first. They served the same Master. He was a friend of Turner's and had a personal liking for him. He might persuade as a friend where Enoch Paul, the minister, might fail. He would go that very afternoon to find Crompton in his own house. Might the spirit of God make of him a vehicle for the loving kindness of his Master. As he walked on his heart burned within him. How much he had received! What joy in prayer he had—what benefits! What should he render?

"Lord, in the strength of grace,
With a glad heart and free,
Myself, my residue of days
I consecrate to Thee."

Chapter 27

BEN CROMPTON lodged in one of the smallest and poorest cottages in the village. Indoors he sat in his shirt-sleeves to save the appearance of his coat for outdoor uses, and it was in his shirt-sleeves that he now answered Mr. Paul's knock at the cottage door.

"Well, Mr. Paul, I never expected—Come into the parlour. I'll get my coat—I'm sure I'm sorry to be taken unawares like this," he stammered, very much out of countenance.

"Never mind, Mr. Crompton," remonstrated Mr. Paul laughing. "I have shirt-sleeves, too, under my coat. Please be at ease."

"It's very seldom, I assure you, Mr. Paul, that I am caught like this," lamented Crompton. "We all have our little weaknesses."

" Indeed we have," said Mr. Paul, seating himself, after squeezing past the table with the check tablecloth which occupied the greater part of the mean room. " Last Monday night I was speaking at the Home Missionary Meeting at Upton. We had all settled on the platform and I'd got my notes in order and got fairly under way with my speech when I happened to notice the cuff of my coat. It had a big patch of paint on it and then I saw that it was my old study coat (I believe it has a hole in the seam at the shoulder). I'd forgotten to change it. Well, I believe I almost forgot my speech, I felt so uncomfortable. How dependent we are on these trifles. But it was some time before I was able to laugh at it and think it a trifle, though," added Mr. Paul ruefully. While he was talking thus to put Crompton at his ease, Mr. Paul was observing the lack of comfort in the room. " I must ask that generous Albert Japp in Upton if he can manage to send a comfortable armchair to Crompton," the good man thought. " It could stand in that corner where the what-not is, and perhaps Crompton's landlady could be persuaded to put that somewhere else."

Crompton, having put on his coat, sat down rather formally on a high chair at the table. It seemed to be his accustomed seat, for some manuscript lay with a penny ink-bottle at that side of

the table. The whole of the furniture seemed to have the appearance of never having settled anywhere but to have been in a state of passage from one sale to another—hastily bought and hastily disposed of. Mr. Paul was not himself accustomed to any great standard of taste, but he felt the discomfort of the unaired room and lack of brightness everywhere.

Crompton did not like Mr. Paul, whom he suspected of despising him because of his lack of reading. Mr. Paul's reading was wide and solid. He had not responded readily when Crompton had once told him that for his part he was a "man of one book." In so self-conscious a man as Crompton suspicions were always awake. Someone or other was thinking something not to his credit. Mr. Paul was aware of and pitied this weakness. He now very sedulously set himself to dispel the other's formality and distant manner. Crompton, himself a home mission evangelist, was genuinely interested in the condition of home missions in the country, and Mr. Paul, who had that week been meeting a large deputation of workers, entered warmly into praise of their spirit and achievements. He drew from the other the story of his own desire to serve in the town in which he had been brought up—the son of a consumptive weaver—but it was judged best to send him into the country for his health. He had

never taken kindly to the country or its people. He would like to have led the band which beat its progress through the mean streets of big towns, and leading men and women to the mission would have preached to them of sin and judgment.

"It's very hard ground in these country districts," said Crompton. "So little encouragement anywhere."

Mr. Paul knew what discouragement meant and his heart warmed to this man so ungifted by nature. How could he tell or judge of the endeavours of such as he for the Master he served? "I have often," said Mr. Paul to a friend, "had to repent of the hard judgments I have made, but I have never had cause to be sorry that I judged leniently or charitably."

"It strikes me then," said his friend, "that you must have had very little repenting to do," and now Mr. Paul sat, his heart swelling with sympathy for this man with the one talent only. Did he himself not know discouragement?

"I have found it a good plan," he said aloud, "to examine my discouragements one by one. I know them so well. They are incidental to the Lord's work, I do believe. We hope so much from our efforts. One more word and we believe some soul will enter the Kingdom, and then—a breath—a look—and the holy time has

gone, the decision is unmade. I dare not believe it to be lost, though we are not permitted to see the result. I have found it a great help to me in my work for the Master to remember that there are *many* avenues by which souls draw near to God. Where *I* fail, a better man than I may succeed, and perhaps he may find it easier to succeed because of my own words and prayers before him. At the back of all and behind all, we know there is God by whom no effort after good goes unnoted, no discouragement unaided. Consider the cloud of witnesses. Consider the Saviour Himself. How trifling our discouragements seem in the light of His Cross. How deep our thanksgiving for the mercy shown there. Shall you or I ever forget the moment when we ourselves stood there and were shown His heart of love toward us? It came to me under an oak tree when I was working in the fields as a lad. How the sun shone and the trees waved with happiness. How simple it was. 'The light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun shall be sevenfold, as the light of seven days, in the day when the Lord bindeth up the breach of His people and healeth the stroke of their wound.' Why! even the little birds in the hedges seemed to know of it and be singing about it. There was enough love to take in the whole world of sinners. Don't you remember it, Brother Crompton? Ought *that*

not to be enough for us all our lives, even suppose we had nothing further? And what love to us since! what patience! what pardoning grace!" Mr. Paul's face shone with vision and the warmth of his heart reached Ben Crompton.

"It came to me in the chapel at a revival-meeting," said Crompton, his narrow face almost tender with feeling. "I felt compelled to offer myself for the work. I hoped to live on in the place to which I was attached, but it was seen otherwise. I was just feeling I should like to ask to be removed. A scene like there was the other night—it's a great discouragement. A coarse woman like Hepzibah Hewlett. Did you hear, now, what she did to Mr. Turner?" asked Crompton with a return of his old secretive expression. A curiosity also was apparent in his tone. He would like to know how much Mr. Paul had heard and what. The older man's heart sank a little. It was not warmth of feeling that he needed to awaken. He must deal with this bitterness at its root, but how carefully!

"Is the feeling very sore?" he asked.

"It's dreadful," said Crompton. "Why, you'd think Mr. Turner was his Satanic majesty himself. You know, Mr. Paul, he's within his rights to start a bus if he wants. As Mrs. Turner said to me in tears, poor woman, 'If a man had come from outside and started a bus, nobody would have

said a word about it, but poor Billy comes in for all the hard words known.' " The issues were being confused, it was evident. Mr. Paul prayed for wisdom.

" I know you have a liking for Perry, Mr. Paul," went on Crompton, " but, you know, it would be better for the village, better for the whole neighbourhood, if Perry and his family were somewhere else."

A knock at the door interrupted the speech. Crompton rose to open.

" Good afternoon, Mr. Crompton," said a feminine voice with a studied pronunciation. " Miss Lydiate," ejaculated Mr. Paul, and at the same moment the lady preceded Crompton into the room. One saw at once that it was the figure familiar in almost any village of a lady who kept the gentilities alive in a small private school.

" Good afternoon, Mr. Paul," she said with sprightly archness. " When are you coming to see *me*, I should like to know. *How* often do you come to Wiat and *how* seldom do you come to call on Miss Lydiate ! "

" Ah ! Miss Lydiate must have so many friends at her command," replied Mr. Paul.

" *None* more welcome than Mr. Paul," said Miss Lydiate graciously ; " and now, Mr. Crompton, that *dreadful* scene the other night ! The law should interfere ! and that woman, a

woman I have never spoken to in my life. 'Here's Poll Lydiate,' she said. I have never been publicly insulted before. The arm of the law is what is needed here, I am convinced of it. You heard of our shocking scandal, Mr. Paul, did you not? Ah! I think I heard that you are one of the believers in Perry? You don't *live* in the village, Mr. Paul. You don't see *everything* that goes on. We need the arm of the law in this village, Mr. Paul. I can assure you. That dreadful woman! to commit an assault like that upon poor Mr. Turner. I assure you, Mr. Paul, a good *steady* man is *wanted*. Wanted badly, for the market bus,—reliable as Perry is *not* reliable. I assure you I have found him anything *but* reliable."

"Did he fail you more than that one time, Miss Lydiate?" asked Mr. Paul.

"No," replied Miss Lydiate, "but my confidence is destroyed, Mr. Paul. I never know when it may happen again."

"I can explain that one lapse," said Mr. Paul, "and I am sure you will feel for him rather than blame him. You know the condition of that poor wife of his at times?"

"Everybody must," said Miss Lydiate.

"On that night one of the children was ill and Mary Perry was unable to look after it. Perry was up all night and I fear took drink to keep him

awake, as he says. It is the only time he has ever really failed, I think. Might not one fault be forgiven him ? "

"It's not knowing when it might happen again," said Miss Lydiate. "Once my confidence is gone, Mr. Paul, well, it cannot be easily bestowed again."

"I am sorry ! " replied Mr. Paul patiently. "I had been hoping a good deal from my visit this afternoon. I had turned aside for a purpose. A definite proposal was indeed in my mind. I have been aware of this quarrel with a heavy heart and I cannot but feel how the Master's work is hindered by it. Is it not laid upon us who bear His name to help these others and take away occasions of stumbling from them ? Of those concerned in this strife, I know Perry better than I know Turner. He is suffering under a sense of soreness that this bet was made under such questionable conditions ; a bet made to take away his living—remember that the actual words 'ruin Perry in two years' were used. There was no quarrel with Perry. He was not even present. Can you wonder that rancour and soreness are present in his thoughts ? It would be a hard thing for any of us to bear, and Perry has so many burdens as it is."

"I think you'll find Mr. Turner equally sore and with equal reason after last night," said Miss

Lydiate with severe triumph. "*I* shall certainly refuse to countenance anyone who had that dreadful woman on his side."

"I am sorry that anything so unseemly occurred," said Mr. Paul still more gently. "In fact it was on account of that disturbance that I felt so strongly the need of co-operation on the part of all who care for the Master's Kingdom and work here. I was hoping—in fact I will put it now in the form of a request to Mr. Crompton. He knows Turner and is a trusted friend of his. He will know how to appeal to him. Will you then, Mr. Crompton, as a servant of the Lord, entreat him in the name of the Lord to tear up this root of bitterness, to be courageous enough, to be large-hearted enough to give up this purpose of his? Surely a purpose begun under a momentary irritation ought not to weigh with him when he sees the disastrous results everywhere. We will all join to help him. He can be assured that we will support him in his effort for right to the utmost of our strength and wisdom. *You* know how to reach him, how best to appeal to him. As a brother in Christ I entreat you, Mr. Crompton. Go to him. Plead with him. Spare no entreaty. I will help you in prayer. I will make it my business to go everywhere and spare no pains to allay any soreness that has been aroused."

" I don't agree with you in the least, Mr. Paul," interrupted Miss Lydiate, reddening with indignation. Remembering that she was speaking to a " gentleman " she made a grasp at an arch manner. " Of course, I know Mr. Paul's kind heart! I don't need to be told of *that*, I hope, after my acquaintance with him, but I think that Turner would be a *much* better man in Perry's place and the sooner that family leaves the village the better."

" Mr. Crompton—" began Mr. Paul.

" Oh! I'm sure, Mr. Paul," said Miss Lydiate again, " I feel sure that Mr. Crompton agrees with me. Woman like, you know, I can see where his sympathies lie. We ladies, you know, are much more able to see through a stone wall than you gentlemen. *I* know what Mr. Crompton's thinking, though of course he won't like to say it to *you*, Mr. Paul. We ladies find out things! "

" May I plead again for Perry, Mr. Crompton? " began Mr. Paul.

" I can't in my conscience interfere," said Crompton, though with embarrassment. " I feel that it would be really so much better for the village to have a sober, reliable man. I cannot feel it my duty."

" If Mr. Paul feels it so much, why doesn't *he* appeal to Mr. Turner? " asked Miss Lydiate acutely.

" I will do so," said Mr. Paul rising. " I felt that the more telling appeal would come from his friend, Mr. Crompton, but if he feels no injustice, no casting abroad of evil—you are right, Miss Lydiate—it must be done by those who feel the evil. I will do my best to persuade Turner," and shaking hands with Crompton he let himself out.

" These good men are so *personal* sometimes," said Miss Lydiate, with cheeks still flushed. " I do so dislike that personal application of Scripture."

Crompton seemed thoughtful and did not readily respond and the lady shortly took leave.

" It is strange," thought Mr. Paul, as he walked in the direction of Henry Jennet's house, " how much good a wise woman can do and how much, how terribly much, mischief a foolish one can make."

Chapter 28

MR. PAUL, walking slowly to Henry Jennet's house, thinking deeply as he went, was observed by Mrs. Turner as she came up on the other side of the street. He did not notice her, nor that she turned to watch the direction of his walk.

He was tired in spirit. A good simple man like Henry Jennet had often found a way out for his thoughts. He would rest there and take counsel with his old friend before going on to the interview with Turner. It was not easy to find a reason for going to see Turner. He was not a member of his people, nor even an occasional worshipper at the chapel. He must go straight to the point and deal frankly. Perhaps Henry would give him a clue to Turner's personality.

It was Henry himself who opened the door, Ruby having gone to Upton for the day.

"I'm a little tired, Henry, may I come in and rest?" asked Mr. Paul.

"Come in; come in, Sir," said Henry,

loosening his shoemakers' apron. "I'll get my coat."

"Not on my account, Henry. Come in as you are. I won't stay very long. I've come from Crompton's lodging. Miss Lydiate came in."

"I'm not surprised to hear you're tired, Sir," said Henry.

"I came for your help, Henry. I've often had my heart lightened by a visit to you. Give me your counsel again, my dear friend."

"I don't know where to look, I assure you I don't, Sir, when you talk like that. I can hardly keep from crying. We all lean on you, Mr. Paul. Many a time I've come up disheartened and I've always gone away cheered and hopeful."

"It's this quarrel, Henry," said Mr. Paul.

"Yes, it's bad," agreed Henry.

"I feel that it must be wrestled with at once," went on the minister. "So much bad blood has been made already that it is really difficult. I went to see Crompton in the hope that he would appeal to Turner to withdraw from this rash bet. I think I might have been more successful if Miss Lydiate had not come in by some strange chance at the moment."

"You didn't succeed in persuading him, Sir?" asked Henry thoughtfully.

"I'm afraid not," replied Mr. Paul sadly, "and now I have decided to go straight to Turner and appeal to him. You know him, Henry. What do you think is the way to his heart?"

"He's always kept it very close, Sir, wherever he had it," said Henry. "To tell the truth, I never have had much to do with him. Shall we have a word with the Master, Sir?"

Mr. Paul rose from his seat and at his continued silence, Henry, after a moment's hesitation closed his eyes, laid his hard hands upon the table and in a quiet voice began.

"Dear Lord, how often have we come to Thee disheartened and cast down, and how often have we gone away blessed and encouraged! We have never known the promise to fail, and we come again for it this afternoon. Give us very great carefulness and wisdom just here and now, and so fill us with Thy love for souls that we shall be tender as well as wise. Be with Thy servant, Lord, that's tired this afternoon. Many a time he has fed us with the word of life. Bless him now and hearten him again, for Thy mercy's sake."

"Amen," said Mr. Paul. "Amen."

"I think, Sir," said Henry, still in the same attitude, "that if Turner has a soft spot it's his

youngest little girl. She's been a bit delicate, not quite like the others. She's a nice little thing and those delicate little children seem to cling about your heart. Now, Sir, *I'll* take upon me to talk to Sam. I think—I *know* that he believes me to be his friend. I've always got on very well with Sam and I'll do my best with God's help to put it clear to him. Perhaps we had better see what you can do with Turner first. It's from him the first move *ought* to come, and I don't see quite what Perry *can* do except keep some of his friends quiet. I told Robert Hewlett that Hepzibah had done more harm than good to Perry. 'She's warm hearted, I know,' I said, 'but rash. It'll do no good to Sam.'"

"Get at Hepzibah herself, Henry," said Mr. Paul. "I must go on now. I should think Turner would be free from the bakehouse by now."

"He has tea at five o'clock, Sir, and it's half past four now," returned Henry, pulling out a large silver watch. "I may be a minute or two fast, but it's near that, about half past four. I'll put the kettle on while you're away and I'll hold up your hands in prayer, Sir."

Mr. Paul reached the front door. "I shall look in again soon," he said, turning back. "Can

Miss Jennet give me the spare bedroom to-night, do you think ? "

" She'll be only too pleased, Sir," answered Henry. " I was thinking how sorry she'd be to miss the pleasure of your visit, Sir."

Mr. Paul went on his errand.

Chapter 29

MRS. TURNER having returned home and reported that Mr. Paul was in the village and had just come from Crompton's house and gone to see Jennet, her eldest daughter Irene stationed herself behind the curtain to watch the village street. The room behind the shop was commodious and in thoroughly good order. A large case of birds expensively mounted, with the glass very bright and the table on which it stood well polished, was the chief ornament of the little square hall. Within the living-room there was the same care apparent. A large treadle sewing machine of a new type stood under the window. The lace curtains had been washed and stiffened with a cream-coloured starch and the heavy curtains at the side of the bow window which looked on to the yard were of green rep instead of the more usual crimson. The sideboard or chiffonier, as Mrs. Turner called it, was covered with a green felt, embroidered with pink and gold silks (part of the fancy-work of Irene's evenings) and upon it were heaped silver articles in very bright and good condition. It was part of Irene's work on

Saturday morning to polish this silver, as it was of her evening routine to peel the potatoes for Sunday and make a beef-steak pie to be baked in the bakehouse oven. A piece of crochet work unfinished lay on the green chenille table-cloth, a pattern beside it. It had been lent to Irene by Miss Lydiate, on condition that it was copied by no one else, lest it should become common. "One doesn't like seeing one's own things repeated in all the cottages, does one, Mrs. Turner?" said the lady to whose school Irene had gone until she was fourteen.

The carpet square had a "surround" of oilcloth in a pattern which imitated matting. The chairs were placed corner ways in the angles of the room instead of against the wall. There was a piano on the side farthest from the window with *Les Cloches du Monastere* open upon it, and two crimson candles with gold ornaments were in the sconces. Upon the piano top was another piece of green felt worked with pink and green silk and two filigree photograph frames with family groups stood upon it—a room in which one was aware that all the children's boots were left at the scullery door as they came in, and if the little people of the house ever played it was outside or elsewhere. The table suggested home lessons and the piano "practising." Suddenly Irene called in an excited voice:

"Mother, Mr. Paul's crossing the road and coming here."

"Never!" said her mother, coming in hurriedly from the kitchen; "well I never, so he is. He'll knock in a minute. Don't open the door till I've got upstairs and changed my bodice. Take off that pinafore and tie your hair-ribbon again. There's father just come into the kitchen. Run and tell him Mr. Paul's at the door. Be quick now. I am a sight," and Mrs. Turner, snatching at Irene's pinafore as she unfastened it, ran upstairs. Irene ran in excitement to the kitchen.

"Father, Mr. Paul's coming here. He's at the door now."

Bill Turner paused in the act of taking off his coat, as if he had a mind to go out again. Then he swung it off vigorously and hung it behind the door.

"Let him come," he said coarsely. "Nothing to make a fuss about, is there?"

Mr. Paul's knock was now heard and at a whisper from her mother over the stair-top, "All right, Irene, you can open the door now," the girl, smoothing her hair as she went, opened the door and admitted Mr. Paul.

"Good afternoon, Miss Irene," said Mr. Paul. "Is father at home?"

"Will you step inside, Mr. Paul, and I'll just ask," answered Irene.

"Well, Mr. Paul, this *is* a pleasure," exclaimed Mrs. Turner, bustling forward. "Come into the sitting-room. Irene, love, tell father that Mr. Paul's called. You must excuse the untidy room, Mr. Paul. With a houseful of children you know how difficult it is to keep a tidy place." Mrs. Turner cast a gratified look round the well-kept room. "Sit in the easy chair, now do, Mr. Paul. Father'll be in directly." She talked on to cover her embarrassment. "I don't know whatever father'll say," ran her thoughts.

"Afternoon, Mr. Paul," said Turner in the doorway.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Turner," responded the minister. "You will forgive my coming in business hours. I know how valuable time is to a busy man, but I came with a definite object to see you, so that we can go straight to the point at once."

"Well, and what's the point, Mr. Paul?" asked Turner, with the hint of truculence in his tone.

"I have an appeal to make to you," said Mr. Paul gently, "an appeal to you as a man more successful, more gifted, perhaps, than many of your neighbours; as the father of those whose good opinion you will value increasingly as they go out into the world, with the fine example of a good man before them—sons who will always say,

'Well, it's a clever thing to do, there's no actual wrong in it, but it's not the generous thing. It's not the fine thing my dad would have done in my place, *I* won't do it either.' I plead with you, Mr. Turner, to have the large heart and generous spirit to which your better education and standing call you; to have pity on a man who has a hard struggle in his circumstances. I speak to you in the name of my Master. If you had *every* right on your side and it made the lot of a severely-tried man harder, would it not be your duty to refrain from a course *otherwise* free to you? Let us be frank and open. *Have* you, in your conscience, that right on your side? Will you not put yourself in Perry's place? You have a child who is dear to you? Has not Perry also? Would you not feel it hard if someone, and that a man who was already in easy circumstances, set about a course of action which *must* make it harder for your children to live and succeed? And that for a momentary irritation. Was it worthy of a man in your position to indulge a rash bet with such a stake—the entire livelihood of a poorer man handicapped already in so many ways? The men with whom you made the bet are scarcely of your intelligence or ability. I plead with you, Mr. Turner. Was it worthy of you? Would it not be well to pause now, before further feeling is aroused? Suppose it to be right—if you will—

is it *kind*? There are so few years given us to be kind to one another. Would it not be worth while to put helps in the way of a man less able to help himself than you are instead of hindrances? In the name of the Saviour who gave His life for us, will you not draw back honourably and openly from this ill-considered wager?"

Mr. Paul in his earnestness had not perceived that Mrs. Turner had edged so far behind that she could signal to her husband without being noticed. From behind the minister, she was, by means of energetic nods and raising of eyebrows, urging her husband to get the visitor out at the earliest opportunity. Her pursed lips and annoyed glances at Mr. Paul's unconscious back showed her to be deeply offended. Bill Turner glanced at his wife and back to Mr. Paul. His narrow eyes had a gleam of contempt added to their customary expression. When the minister paused a moment he broke in with a hard shattering voice.

"Well, you know, Mr. Paul, I can't preach like you. It's never been my business. But I've got my own mind about most things and I have about this. I'm going to have the law of that woman before the week's out, and as for Perry, he's on the ground and if he's not able to keep his business together it's time he'd done with it."

"Let me urge you to reconsider," began Mr.

Paul with deep feeling; "we will support you with all our powers."

"It's a bit late to talk of supporting," said Turner with a sneer. "This is the way out, Sir," and he opened the door of the room and striding noisily out threw wide open the front door.

"Good day to you," said Mr. Paul, quietly.

"Good day," said Turner as noisily, "and good riddance," he added within the minister's hearing, as he closed the door with a bang.

When Henry Jennet some moments afterwards opened the door to his friend, he was silent at the first glimpse of Mr. Paul's face. His kind eyes were wet with tears.

Chapter 30

MARKET day was wet—delicious with a silver rustling rain. Drenched hawthorn petals made white patches on the shining road beneath the full-weighted hedges. The landscape was as it were a floor for a rushing and swaying tide of rain, and as the shore with the ebb showed a sparkling and stained loveliness of gleaming pebbles. The colour of the tree boles was stained to bronze and emerald and in the deep lanes, as the wind blew apart the roof of leaves, the rain rushed with the noise of wheels through the rent.

Hepzibah Hewlett, entering the square, encountered her neighbour, Mrs. Horne. "Ain't

this nice ? " she said. " We could do with a good bit of this."

" It's everyone for themselves," replied Mrs. Horne. " *We've* got a good lot of grass down. I *was* sorry to hear the rain this morning."

" I was thinking of my taters," Hepzibah answered. " It's like murder to dig 'em yet. I dug a root for Sunday but they ain't nothing of a size. Big as a pullet's egg, that's all. Fair murder it is to dig 'em."

Mrs. Horne drew off carefully from the consation. Hepzibah was a woman to avoid, she considered, as was everyone who attracted public attention. She was a timid woman, so much in fear of public opinion that she never hung out on her hedge any garment which was worn and patched, but dried all such indoors before the kitchen fire in the evening. She crossed the street for the ostensible purpose of looking in the post office window and Hepzibah continued her way.

There seemed few passengers for the station this morning, nevertheless when Turner drove round to his usual place, his bus was filled within a few seconds. He turned and drove quickly away and nothing moved in the street but the rain. The sound of clattering dishes in the Crown and Cushion and the snatchy singing of a boy's

voice which broke on the high notes into a trembling falsetto,

> " O they locked me up in a dark 'ole
> And covered me over with charcoal
> And there I couldn't see-ee-ee,"

were the only signs of life within the street.

Mrs. Huniset always made a point of being at her window a good deal on market day in case anything of interest was apparent in the square. This morning the green bus came and was gone so quickly that events seemed to the black-eyed mischief to be stationary. No one remained in the square and things were settling down to the mood of steady rain outside, when Mrs. Huniset remembered, as if to the striking of a clock, that she had seen no second bus that morning. She was aware of something fateful. Throwing her cloak over her head she ran with wonderful agility along to the post office.

" You ain't seen Perry this morning, have you?" she asked, bursting the door so suddenly that it almost parted company with its bell. " I had a parcel I wanted him to take—I ain't seed him at all."

" I don't know," said the girl dubiously. " I haven't been looking all the time. I expect he's gone by now."

" I ain't seen him at all. It's too late now. I

had a parcel to send and he ain't come at all this morning," rejoined Mrs. Huniset in agitation. "Isn't it awful now—I shall miss two days on his account. I wish now I'd sent it by Mr. Turner."

"Where is it? Perhaps it's not too big for the post," said the postmaster, coming in from the back of the shop.

"Why, it's ever so big," replied Mrs. Huniset, becoming voluble. "It's a man's work to lift it. It ain't fit for anybody to carry on a bicycle, *far* too big it is. I'll not trust Perry again as long as I live. I wish I'd sent it by Mr. Turner."

The postmaster looked shrewdly at Mrs. Huniset, for whom he had no liking, and the girl turned away to continue the dusting of the shop.

"Isn't it awful to have a man you can't depend on," said Mrs. Huniset, pulling her mackintosh over her head again and opening the door. "He's made me miss two days," she repeated, as she closed the door behind her.

"Perhaps Collis'll take it in on the milk cart to-night," observed the girl to the man, as Mrs. Huniset scuttled across the street.

"Perhaps," returned the postmaster with dry emphasis. "*She* ain't got no *parcel*," he added as he went back to his room behind the shop.

Mrs. Huniset ran back to her house and as she pushed open the door with her elbow, saw a folded note lying on the oilcloth inside. "Well I

never," she ejaculated, " and I'd only been gone that little bit. I wonder who it is," and she picked up the note folded in the shape of a cocked hat and addressed in the extreme corner to " Mrs. Huniset, *par bonté de* John Mellin."

" Oh, it's Miss Lydiate," said the woman, " wonder what she wants. It can't be Lizzie leaving ; " she opened the note.

" Miss Lydiate would be obliged if Mrs. Huniset would make it convenient to do a little light cleaning for her on Thursday or Friday afternoon."

" It's Thursday to-day," remembered Mrs. Huniset. " I'll go this very afternoon."

Miss Lydiate's " hall," as she called the small passage which admitted to her house, was piled with chairs and occasional tables when Mrs. Huniset arrived in the afternoon, and the square-figured girl whom she designated her parlour-maid, but who was actually the only servant of the establishment, was standing on the " steps " breathing upon and polishing the overmantel. The lace curtains were pinned away from the windows.

" We're giving it a good clean to-day ready for Saturday," said Lizzie, speaking to Mrs. Huniset, through the looking-glass. " I'll go on with the windows if you get started with the furniture."

" Has she only got that muck of Adams's ?

asked Mrs. Huniset, looking with disapproval at the thorough preparations for a " good clean."

" No, she got some new stuff," answered Lizzie; " 'tain't bad. You knows where the dusters is." Lizzie gave a final polish to the overmantel and descended the steps. She dragged them over to the window, shook out her leather and mounted. Just then Miss Lydiate herself appeared in the hall. She carried a tray of that species of arch and knowing pottery which she described as statuary, and from the fact that she was covered by an overall it was evident that she had been washing such ornaments as she could not leave to the clumsy fingers of servants.

" Good afternoon, Mrs. Huniset," she said. " We are getting ready for our little At Home, as you see." She laid the tray on the chiffonier as she spoke. " Now we're quite ready to have the furniture moved back. If you polish each piece and put it in its place as you have finished we'll lay the drugget over the carpet and you can polish the fire-irons in the kitchen after tea."

Mrs. Huniset had no intention of doing anything after tea, so that it was well to be a long time in beginning, and besides she had hurried out on this wet day for a quite other reason than " giving a good clean " to Miss Lydiate's drawing-room. " If I work Lizzie right, we'll have buttered toast to our tea," she also reflected.

"Ain't that pretty, 'm?" she said as Miss Lydiate placed on a shelf of the overmantel a shepherdess with a crook. "It ain't half a good clean Lizzie give that overmantel. It's as good as having two ornaments to have them little looking-glasses behind 'em. I never seen any house have such a lot of statues and that lovely bead thing at the fire. A lovely drawing-room, ain't it, 'm? Shall I help you to put them things up, 'm? It's too much for you, you has to be very careful with 'em, hasn't you, 'm? It isn't everybody knows how to look after their ornaments. Why, there isn't a chip or a crack on any of them little things. It shows they've always had a lady to look after 'em, and not been left to young girls."

Mrs. Huniset, with laborious deliberation, lifted the "statues" and placed them in the canopies and niches of the overmantel. When they had all been deposited she laid hands on the tray and said:

"Let me take it to the kitchen, 'm. Don't you do any more now. Lizzie and me'll see to the cleaning."

Having possession of the empty tray and being therefore in the very act of work, Mrs. Huniset managed to postpone still further the polishing of the furniture by picking up Lizzie's duster which had fallen from the top of the ladder and

replacing it as carefully. Then she threw her final obstruction. "Did you hear about this morning, 'm?" she asked, with the satisfied expression of one who could say a great deal more if she chose.

"No?" both answered and inquired Miss Lydiate's voice. Lizzie paused in her polishing of the window.

"Only Turner's bus this morning," replied Mrs. Huniset with full weight.

"And that Perry was not there?" asked Miss Lydiate, with rising excitement, arrested in the act of leaving the room.

"No, 'm," said Mrs. Huniset with gratified brevity.

"I *wish* I had Mr. Paul here," exclaimed Miss Lydiate. "I've half a mind to write to him this very afternoon. *Now* you see what comes of trusting unreliable people. Once *fail*—never to be trusted again. It's a sure rule. Oh, *how* I wish Mr. Paul could be told. I should like to see his face. Now, Mr. Paul, *wasn't* I right?" and Miss Lydiate, in triumphant excitement, apostrophised the absent minister.

"Yes, 'm, you was," said Mrs. Huniset. "Mr. Paul, you know, he's all right with them he takes a fancy to, but he doesn't pay sufficient attention to the others."

"Not enough judgment," declared Miss

Lydiate. "Mr. Ben Crompton now is not nearly so well educated a man, but he shows such ability to judge character."

An expression of too violent an interest having appeared in Mrs. Huniset's face at Miss Lydiate's mention of Crompton, that lady, warned of the direction of her charwoman's thoughts, hastened to add: "Of course he isn't the gentleman that Mr. Paul is, but he seems to show so much more discrimination. He certainly has done so in the matter of Perry. Look what inconvenience a man like that can cause."

"Yes, 'm, that's how I found him out," said Mrs. Huniset. "I had a parcel to send. Lost me two days he has, that Perry. I shall have to wait two days now. I shall never trust him again as long as I live."

"Just what *I* say, Mrs. Huniset," replied the gratified Miss Lydiate. "Just what I say myself. When a trust is once abused you must look elsewhere. I am sorry that Mr. Paul encouraged the man. I must say I cannot think so highly of him as I once did."

"There never was no one else to go by except this last month," here interposed Lizzie, who began to regard Mrs. Huniset's reluctance to begin work with acute disfavour.

"But *now* there is, Lizzie," reproved Miss Lydiate. But Lizzie's diversion had succeeded

in so far as she continued, " Now, Mrs. Huniset, for the furniture."

" Yes, 'm," said Mrs. Huniset leaving the room. Some minutes elapsed and she reappeared carrying a tray with a teapot and some tea-cups upon it.

" The kettle was boiling a gallop when I went into the kitchen," she explained, " I thought you'd be glad of a cup of tea, 'm, and Lizzie as well. I'd sooner do without my dinner than my cup of tea, any day. I thought you looked tired, 'm. Have a cup of tea before you does any more, 'm.

" Now when would *you* have thought of such a thing, Lizzie ? " exclaimed Miss Lydiate, sitting on a chair in the hall and drinking her tea. Lizzie sat on the step-ladder.

" Haven't you brought a third cup for yourself ? " asked Miss Lydiate.

" Oh ! *I* don't want none, 'm," said Mrs. Huniset. Nor did she, for she had already had two cups in the kitchen from that very teapot which she afterwards filled up with hot water. " What the eye never sees the heart never grieves " she was accustomed to assert on such occasions.

" But as I was saying about Mr. Paul. He's very partial to some people and leaves others to look after themselves. Of course, we've never *been* destitute and with Huniset's brother so well-to-do I suppose we never shall be. Still,

you like to be thought of. Old Mr. Porter, now, he wasn't half a nice old gentleman. 'Well! how are you all?' he'd come in and say. 'Here's a shilling for you.' A real nice old gentleman he was. But Mr. Paul he don't give nothing except to them as he takes a notion to. Of course, as I was saying, we ain't destitute. Still, everybody has their feelings."

"Mr. Paul wasn't half kind to my brother," interposed Lizzie again. "Always coming to see how he was, and then he got him put in that sanatorium—paid out of his own pocket, too. I ain't going to hear any bad of Mr. Paul."

"Mrs. Huniset was not intending any harm of Mr. Paul, Lizzie," said Miss Lydiate. "But *I* think also that he has been wrong in encouraging that Perry—a most unreliable man—and I shall make it my business to see that he is informed of the matter. And now to business," exclaimed Miss Lydiate, rising abruptly. "If you've finished, Lizzie, you might go on with the fire-irons in the kitchen and Mrs. Huniset will get on with the furniture."

Mrs. Huniset, with a secret smile at the disappearance of the fire-irons from her horizon, attacked the chairs with a duster and much apparent vigour until Miss Lydiate and Lizzie had disappeared, one to the kitchen and the other to "dress," when she as quickly as possible re-

placed the whole of the furniture within the room and unrolled the drugget half way over the floor. She was then at liberty to look through the curtain to see if anything happened. But since nothing did and she could have her own company at any time, she soon followed Lizzie to the kitchen to "work" the buttered toast for tea. It was only at night, when Lizzie, reflecting upon the speed with which the furniture had been polished, went into the drawing-room bent upon scrutiny, that she exclaimed, "Well, I never saw anything like it. She ain't even put a duster on them chairs. Ain't she a Biddy."

On her way home, Mrs. Huniset fell in with the postman.

"Wait a bit, Edward," she called. "It 's a bit dark, you might wait for me."

The postman checked his speed for a moment until Mrs. Huniset was alongside.

"You've heard about the bus this morning," she began. "Perry's missed again. There ain't no relying on a man like that. Lost me two days he has. Half an hour I was waiting for his bus. I shan't wait no more. I shall send by Turner next time. It's inconvenient never to know if Perry's coming or not."

"Was there anybody to go ?" asked the postman.

"Heaps of people," said Mrs. Huniset.

"Well, there's where you've wrong," said Edward, with a grin. "For I was watching for Perry myself. 'If Bill Turner's so anxious to drive a bus,' he said, 'he can have the wet days to do it in. Look out for me if there's more than fills his bus, Edward, will you?' he says. I don't know where *you* was, but I was about all the time and I didn't see any heaps of anything except rain. There was plenty of that lying around."

"I knows plenty that isn't going to employ Perry any more," said Mrs. Huniset rather nettled. "You can't wonder at it. He's unreliable and it's a wonder a man like Mr. Paul stands up for him. It speaks badly for Mr. Paul. I've heard many a one say so besides me."

"Old Miss Mim, I suppose," said Edward. "Well, I'm going up this way. I'll call for your parcel to-night."

"I ain't got it ready," let slip Mrs. Huniset.

Edward grinned. "Nobody ever thought you had," he threw over his shoulder as he turned across the field.

Chapter 31

IT was a still morning, full of birds' singing and pale sunshine. The sky, without distance, appeared a leaden permanence. The clouds were streaked with snow. Gleaming drops of melted frost fell at intervals from the branches. Ponds gleamed a bluish-grey against the white snow which remained in drifts in the corners of the fields. The ground was moist and sticky and the mass of the woods a ruddy purple, branches and stems everywhere showing colour against the sobriety of the earth. The coppiced hedges opened new spaces in the fields bare of cattle as of harvest.

Mr. Paul was walking the ten miles which separates Wiat from his own town. He strode with the buoyancy of a man in health and vigour who returns as it were to his own element. The open sky refreshed his eyes and the scents of the fields were like water to kine long thirsty in drought. The feet treading the road fell with a happy ring and the blue eyes looked about them with the gaiety of a boy, or a countryman treading lanes and fields after pavements and streets, and seeing under the hedges primroses in blossom.

Once or twice he laughed at the recollection of a group he had passed on the road, for he had a great zest for such things. He had passed further back an old man seated on a heap of stones to whom a small grandson had just brought his basin of dinner. The boy was so rolled up in jerseys and mufflers that he seemed like a small bundle on legs as he stood in front of the old man, who, with legs wide apart, was opening his red handkerchief with slow, stiff fingers.

"You know, granfer," the child piped, continuing some conversation which Mr. Paul had missed, "you might get put in prison if you goes on doing that."

"Oh?" interrogated granfer.

"You don't want to get put in prison, do you, granfer?" queried the shrill voice.

"No," replied the old man, who had caught sight of Mr. Paul and given a wink of intelligence to him, as much as to call his attention to this prodigy of a grandson. His own white old face was wrinkled with an expression between merriment and pride.

"Well, you know, granfer," continued the child, "you'll *have* to go if you're *put*."

"Then I shall have to avoid being put," returned the patriarch, at which Mr. Paul had laughed aloud and the child had retreated to his grandfather's side.

"Oh, dear, oh," chuckled the old man as Mr. Paul passed on laughing. He wiped his mouth with the back of his hand and the tears came into his withered blue eyes. "Oh *dear*, oh," he exclaimed, while the small boy turned his back and began to throw stones at the trunk of the oak under which they were sitting. Mr. Paul, still smiling at the recollection of the little group on the heap of stones, strode on vigorously. Here, in a wide reach of meadow-land, the fields were a vivid green with their new grass and the distant woods a sombre black. As the day advanced, the bird voices no longer sang, but called and whistled, dominating the air. Mr. Paul paused to listen. Even the tiny voices of insects became audible in the unstirred air. How profound was the silence. How inviolate the peace. A speck of rain stung his face and a black snail crawled into the road. A team of horses appeared high within the field at an open gate, the wagoner dragging back, by the weight of his body and slipping feet, the onward rush of the animals. Mr. Paul, with a good-day to the man, stood aside to let him pass, and the rattling wheels and head-brasses were soon swallowed by the steep banks of a sunken lane. The road was moist and miry at the gate, the churned-up earth from the field having been carried out as the horses' hoofs and the thickly clogged wheels slid on to

the firmer metal. Farther on, disturbed by the wagon and the cracking whip of the carter, a flock of rooks rose and circled round a plantation of old trees, alighting again with cawing like the creaking of branches. Mr. Paul, swinging his stick, his warm blood pulsing from the freedom of his walk, found everything very good. Suddenly, at the entrance to a copse on the left hand side of the road, he saw a bunch of white violets. With the agility of a boy he leapt the gate and gathered them, then re-vaulted the wicket to find himself face to face with a lanky boy who was driving a pig tied by the back leg. The boy, his tow hair showing through a hole in his cap, his face very hard and rosy, his legs longer than his trousers and his boots tied with string, was watching Mr. Paul's movements as one of the unexpected diversions which occur during disagreeable occupations in the country. The small pig, rooting with zest, pulled him now and then off his balance, but, with a jerk to the rope and without looking at it, he pulled it into a position more convenient to himself. Sometimes the pig, having settled within himself long ago that wherever he was being driven must be exactly the place to which under all circumstances he disliked going, obeyed with a squeal, revenging himself now and then by wrapping the cord round the boy's legs.

"Good day, Jack," said Mr. Paul, springing clear of a patch of trodden mud.

"Fine day, Mr. Paul," replied the boy. "Fond of white vilets, Sir?" he asked with a sly sideways look at Mr. Paul's hand.

"Now, Jacky, what are you laughing at?" demanded Mr. Paul, with a whimsical glance from beneath his shaggy eyebrows. "Never seen me jump a gate before?"

"Well, Sir—no, Sir, I haven't," said Jack. "Come on," to the pig. "He ain't half a torment," he confided. "I'm going along the same road as you, Sir. I'll go along with you."

"Aren't you a good way from home?" asked Mr. Paul.

"Well, you see, Sir, they've got foot and mouth disease at Upton. Can't take the cows out, not even across the road,"

"Is it very bad?" asked Mr. Paul.

"Yes, Sir, I think it *is* bad," replied Jack. "My father wanted to shift some cows yesterday and he wrote to the overseer. 'No,' he says. 'I'm sorry, but I've got a lot in your position,' he says. 'If you can't get the cows out without crossing the road they must stay in,' he said. 'There was a farmer, when I was a boy,' he says, 'and he had fifty cows and all of 'em had to be killed. It's better to have a little inconvenience now,' he says, 'than lose all your cows later.'

"If you was to hold my pig, Sir," broke off Jack, "I wants to get over that gate to see if my trap's all right. I put one over in that bank as I come along to tell my uncle. Very plagued with rabbits, my uncle is. This is his field, Sir," and Jack pressed the knotted end of rope into Mr. Paul's hand and put one leg over the gate.

"Just take him along the road, Sir, till you come to the other gate and I'll come across the meadow there," said the boy, starting off at a run without looking back.

The pig, in the exchange, had felt the rope slacken and began an energetic trot, Mr. Paul, mightily entertained, trotting after him. The pig made a sudden sideways swerve and became aware once more of the rope. He made an immediate resolve to return home and Mr. Paul spun round with violence. He hauled at the rope and the pig with a great squealing at last returned. Mr. Paul, by a dexterous twist of the rope round his wrist and some sharp taps with his stick, brought the pig to the right direction, in which for a short distance he proceeded content. It was not the first time Mr. Paul had driven a pig. It was another recollection of his boyhood which now returned to him with so many other forgotten sensations. He steered his curly-tailed piece of perversity with increasing agility, laughing now and then and dodging unlooked-for departures

and bolts with the enjoyment of a boy at a game.

" I wonder if Jack will turn up," he said to himself, as he approached the far gate of the pasture. " Oh, yes, there he is," he added, as he caught sight of Jack lumbering towards the gate across the saggy and uneven meadow-land. He clambered over the gate, his muddy boots leaving thick mats of mud and grass where they gripped the rail.

" I suppose you wouldn't like to hold him a bit longer, Sir ? " he said. " I seed a hedgehog under there once. Under them faggots in the corner. I might just have a look for him now I happens to be here. I don't come along so often. Very useful a hedgehog in the garden, Sir."

" Hedgehogs aren't awake yet, Jack," said Mr. Paul.

" I might just have a look for his nest, perhaps," said Jack. " Ain't no hurry for the pig, Sir."

" Off you go then," said Mr. Paul, " but don't stay too long, you know. Perhaps there's more hurry for me than for the pig."

" I won't be a minute, Sir," said Jack, already half over the gate. In a few seconds Mr. Paul saw his thickly soled boots kicking from beneath the piled faggots propped together end upwards in the manner of a tent. A good deal of scrambling and scratching went on beneath the brush-

wood. A mouse ran out and a robin perched on the edge singing as if in a sudden gust of expostulation.

"Have you got him?" called Mr. Paul.

"I seed a snake," said Jack in excitement. "He didn't half travel when he saw *me*. No! I ain't got him. It's a pity we can't get rid of the pig, Sir. We might have a try for him. If you was to go that end and I'd go this, I could send him out and you could whack him over the head with your stick."

"Aye, but here's the pig, Jack," said Mr. Paul.

"I suppose so," said Jack ruefully, regarding the pig with dislike.

"If you come along on Monday afternoon, I'll go with you and we'll have a look together for the hedgehog," said Mr. Paul.

"Will you, Sir? and I'll get a bag to put him in. Ain't easy to catch hold of a hedgehog."

"It won't be the first hedgehog I've caught, Jack," said Mr. Paul. "But I must get on now. I mustn't be late at Wiat," and Mr. Paul gave the rope to Jack.

"Come on," grunted Jack. "I daresay he'll keep up with you, Sir, if I whack him behind enough."

"How's your little sister, Jack?" asked Mr. Paul.

"She ain't very well, Sir," said Jack, "my

Aunt Lizabeth she says she's going the same way as my brother Henry, Sir, what died last Christmas, but she don't tell my mother that. It wouldn't do, you know, Sir; she'd take on."

"Was it last Christmas your brother died?" asked Mr. Paul.

"Yes, Sir, and my mother was upsetted. They was having a Christmas tree and they sent in my brother's toys from it, and he was dead and they didn't know. My mother she was upsetted to see the toys and my brother dead."

"Poor thing," said Mr. Paul.

"There was a money-box," continued Jack. "Come on—and my mother she won't let me have it. My brother don't want it now he's dead, do he, Sir? She won't let me have it."

"You ask for one of the old sow's ears and make a silk purse out of it," suggested Mr. Paul, to make a diversion.

"Go on—you're having me," said Jack in dudgeon.

The first house of Wiat parish was now visible.

"There's skylarks going on to-night in Wiat," observed Jack with sudden delighted recollection.

"Now what mischief are you lads up to?" asked Mr. Paul. How well he remembered the schemes of the village lads of long ago of whom he was the accepted leader—the giggling and nudg-

ing, the meetings on dark nights, the holding of breaths when some heavy tread approached their hiding-place, the turnip lanterns which gave an air of conspiracy, the smell of fizzling matches.

"Tain't only lads—there's gaffers in it, too. Ain't no moon is there, to-night?"

"No, you'll have it dark enough," said Mr. Paul.

"I'm not in it, but I knows who is," said Jack.

"Well now, who is it?" asked Mr. Paul, looking straight ahead very innocently.

"It's—it's them as it is," answered Jack, bursting into triumphant giggles. "I ain't coming up to Wiat, Sir, I'm going this way," he said, as they came near a field path.

"Well, good-bye, Jack. Good-bye. Be a good lad," and Mr. Paul went on.

"Good-bye, Sir," answered Jack, standing for the space of two minutes to watch Mr. Paul get well ahead and then following him at a dawdling walk into the village of Wiat.

Chapter 32

MR. PAUL was a young man again as he turned into Henry Jennet's door. How he seemed to understand and belong to the country through which his walk had taken him. He seemed to see himself again in the boy with whom he had walked. Even his cunning, too transparent to be evil, he seemed to know and understand. At the age of fifty-six he felt himself not a day older than the boy. His enjoyment was as keen. He knew that when Monday came he would set off to catch the hedgehog not a whit behind Jack in excitement. He wondered what the sky-larking was going to be. Turnip lanterns, old smocks and groans. He must be on the watch for them as he went to the station in the dark. It was just the night for skylarks. He took off his overcoat, hanging it on the state row of "crooks" in the hall (Henry hung his clothes behind the kitchen door), and entered the parlour with his face full of merriment and goodwill.

"You've had a long walk to-day, Mr. Paul. You'll want your tea," said Henry.

"Aye, it was bonny, it was indeed," said Mr. Paul, his whole person radiating vigour.

" It's done you good, Sir, I can see it has," said Henry, his white face responding with pleasure. " It's a good thing to get away from your books, sometimes."

" I *did* enjoy it," repeated Mr. Paul. " It was like having the years of my life renewed in that ten miles. By the way, Henry, who would that be whom I passed on the road ? " and Mr. Paul described the incident of the old man and the child. Henry laughed.

" Oh, yes, we can all recognise Tommy, already, Sir. It's that cottage back in the field they've come to. Father's a ploughman and the old gaffer does a bit of stone-breaking. Funny little fellow, isn't he ? "

" He is, indeed," said Mr. Paul laughing.

" Now I *am* glad to see you laugh like you used to, Sir," said Henry, regarding his friend with beaming affection. " It does me more good than my tea. You've carried too big a burden over this bus affair. It's really done me good to hear that laugh of yours again, Sir."

" I must manage it a little oftener then, Henry," said Mr. Paul. " How did you get on with Sam ? "

" Not so bad, not so bad," replied Henry. " Just you fill up your cup, Sir, and have a good tea after all that walk. I went, as you know, to see Sam that evening. I put it to him like this, Sir. ' You know, Sam,' I said, ' you've all those

little children of yours coming on and unless you spread yourself out a little they can't stop at home long. They're little now,' I said, ' but they'll be big soon. Now,' I said, ' Sam, you've got your horse and you've got a good piece of ground about the house and you've got all your fowls to the good, and Mary's an excellent hand at the poultry. (She is, you know, Sir. It never seems to put her off them, this affliction of hers). How about branching out bit by bit into a little business in poultry and vegetables ? Not all at once, you know, Sam, but as you get it together. And then you see,' I said, ' there'll be a beginning made for your two biggest lads and they could work up a trade between here and Upton. There's one or two big gardens that must have a lot to spare. Why, there's an acre and a half of kitchen garden in Longend, and only one old lady besides the servants. I'm sure now a place like that would be glad of someone calling regularly to take their vegetables away, and there's shops in Upton always wanting supplies. If you was once to make a beginning, bit by bit you could work it with one hand while you ran the bus with the other.' I talked to him a bit like that and then poor fellow he began to talk."

" He's still very sore ? " asked Mr. Paul.

" Yes, he's sore, poor Sam," said Henry, " but he came to see there might be something in it for

the lads. He said he'd think about it, and you know I always think that's a step gained. Dear me, I can't repeat all the things he said," added Henry with a rueful smile. 'Now really,' I said, 'Sam, I don't like to hear you use such words. I cannot see the sense of using words that don't spell anything,' I said, 'and then he was a bit more careful—at least he *tried* to be. I saw him pulling himself up sometimes and I could hardly help laughing. 'You see, Sam,' I said, 'this is an untouched field of work just here and you'll have it all to yourself and I *know*, I'm *certain*,' I said, 'I can *guarantee* you sympathy from everybody. Just you think it over in quietness, Sam,' I said. Well, Sir, he began again. It was all Mr. Paul wheedling him into it. Why should *he* be the one to begin. He didn't begin the other and he didn't see why he should begin this. He wasn't going to do it to please Mr. Paul nor nobody else, and then he told me to mind *my* own business or I'd get *my* fingers rapped. 'Now, Sam,' I said, 'I don't mind even getting my fingers *broken* if it'll give you peace of heart. I'll tie them up again with grace.' And that amused him and he was obliged to laugh. 'Think it well over, Sam,' I said before I left, 'and remember the children as well as yourself.' I think, you know, Sir, if nothing happens to irritate any further, we've gained Sam over, Sir. We shall

have to be moving along now, Sir, but I'll go around to one or two places in the morning. I know one or two gardeners that bring repairs to me and I'll sound them a bit and lay the way for Sam when he's come to a decision. *I'll* get your coat, Sir. I should give it a good warm inside before you goes out in the cold. I'll not be a minute putting my boots on."

Together the two men left the house. It seemed truly to Mr. Paul the lifting of a great load. The whole afternoon, with the passing of winter and the full burst of spring, seemed to have been the precursor of this spiritual renewal. It was with a heart entirely happy and charged anew with hope that Enoch Paul uttered his reply to his friend.

"Thank God, Henry."

The sudden darkness in the street when the door was shut made the two men pause and grope for a few steps. A figure rushed quickly past them and apparently turned into the one side street of the village. Almost immediately another followed and some giggling was audible from the corner. Mr. Paul stumbled on the edge of a doorstep, but in a few moments the shapes of houses became apparent and the lighted blinds showed like windows into the darkness itself. A man, bulking large on the pavement, wished a curt good-night. A dog barked incessantly from

a distance and from a more remote darkness an owl called like a calamity.

When Mr. Paul and Jennet emerged from the prayer meeting an hour later with a group of poor people, the stars were so clear above as to give a discreet light upon the roads and houses.

"You'll be able to see your way to the station after all," said Henry, with satisfaction. "I believe you'll even find your way down the short cut by Turner's bakehouse."

"I'll turn down there, it cuts off a good angle," said Mr. Paul, and bidding good-night he disappeared round the corner of the lane. The few poor worshippers dispersed. Henry Jennet turned to lock the door of the building. As he shut the iron gate behind him, a large boy rushed past him again, panting and breathless with laughter. As he did so Jennet heard a sharp cry. He turned to listen and a vague hubbub became apparent. Putting the key in his pocket, he turned quickly in the direction of the bakehouse. "It sounded very like Mr. Paul's voice," he said. Several men jostled him as he turned the corner. They, too, seemed hurrying. "Did you hear someone call out?" he asked, but they disappeared quickly into the dark. The lane was sloping and very obscure, almost roofed between hedges standing visible against the starlight.

"Is that somebody coming down the lane?" asked a woman's voice.

"It sounds like Betty Betch," said Henry. "Is that Betty?"

"Oh, Mr. Jennet, how relieved I am. I heard a cry of pain and I ran and found someone—a man, I think, lying at the side of the road. I fell over a piece of rope, but I'm not hurt at all. If you will see to the man, I will run quickly to fetch a light. Shall I ask at Mr. Turner's, or will it be a liberty?"

"Ask at the nearest place if someone's hurt," said Henry, but at that moment Mr. Paul's voice sounded from the side of the lane.

"Never mind a light, Betty, thank you. I fell down over something and struck my chest on the root of a tree rather hard. I shall have to ask for your hospitality again to-night, Henry. This pain makes me dizzy."

"Have you hurt yourself badly, Sir?" asked Henry, groping. "Get a hold of my arm. I can't hardly see where you are, it's so dark. Oh yes! I've got you now! Give me your hand, Sir, and I'll help you up."

"Shall I go on and tell Miss Ruby?" said Betty. "Hot fomentation's a good thing. I'll go and get some poppy heads, I was only saying I'd give them away; I'll go home and get—"

"No! no! no!" protested Mr. Paul, rising

now of his own accord. "I shall be all right. I couldn't think of your going all that way."

"Now what do you suppose you fell over, Sir?" asked Henry, groping with hands and feet carefully in the darkness. "Here it is," he exclaimed, drawing a rope from the side. "It's fastened too! tight at this root where you hit yourself. I wonder who's done a silly dangerous trick like this."

Mr. Paul suddenly remembered the sky-larking. His chest throbbed with the pain and he caught his breath.

"Some mischievous boy, I expect," he said, with a laugh that became a groan. "I have a shrewd suspicion that it was meant for someone else. Happily it was no worse and I came along before the other person. So we can keep it to ourselves and there will be no more bad blood made. Fasten the rope safely out of the way, Henry. Cut it, perhaps, so that it can't be used again to-night, at any rate."

"I think I've managed it," said Henry, who had been fumbling and dragging at the rope for some minutes. "Yes, I've got it." He unfastened the rope and, rolling it in a coil, helped Mr. Paul to his feet. They returned home slowly.

Chapter 33

THERE was some constraint apparent among the visitors to the Buck i' th' Vine on the evening following Mr. Paul's accident. John Fryatt, behind the bar, served his customers with an impartial air, as if committing himself to neither judgment or commendation. There was even something a little sacrificial in his demeanour as he drew jug after jug and passed them across the counter, more in sorrow than in anger. An embarrassed silence held the men until, to the obvious relief of everybody, Armitage the blacksmith, always to the front in speech, said :

" That was a caution about Mr. Paul, last night, wasn't it ? "

" I knows one or two that was in it," said Collis.

" And so do I," added two men seated from habit by the fireside, though the grate was empty.

" Anyone seen old Billy ? " asked Armitage.

There was a laugh. Billy had not been seen.

" Heard anything of Mr. Paul ? " asked Armitage.

" I saw Betty Betch this morning, coming home from Jennet's she was, as I was going down

with the milk," answered Collis. "She said Mr. Paul went home all right in the end. Hurted his chest on a big root that was sticking out into the lane."

"That'll be that old elm that Willis cut down when he had the bakehouse," observed an old labourer.

"Why didn't he cut it down proper when he was about it. Tain't no use doing a thing by halves, you'd better by half do it properly," said Fryatt.

This was a sentiment so unanswerable in its propriety that a loud assent went round the room.

"Pity it got Mr. Paul," said Armitage. "I don't hold with that sort of thing, but if it *was* going to be done it's a pity it got Mr. Paul and not Bill Turner."

"I'd like to have heard him if it *had* got him," said Collis.

At this moment the door opened and before anyone had quite realised what had occurred Billy Bawtrey stood within the room. A dead silence was followed on the instant by a roar of derision.

"Slept in the razor box, didn't ye, before you was sharp enough to think of a thing like that?" shouted Armitage.

"You'd better get out of the country," said Collis, "it's a hanging job, this 'ere."

"I'll lend you my coat as a disguise," said Armitage.

Billy's complacency changed to the vindictive acerbity of old age. From derisive taunting the feeling of the room passed to indignation.

"Getting old and childish, old Billy is," said Collis. "Better go and play with kids."

"What was you thinking of to go and do a thing like that?" demanded Fryatt. "Don't you know it's a serious matter to do anything of that sort?"

There was a desire throughout the room to disclaim any connection with the pranks of a bygone generation. Billy sat in offended disdain.

"He'd better be got in the asylum next vacancy there is," said Armitage.

Billy's spite had found a victim. Armitage was a young man and with all the acrimony of old age he turned upon him.

"There's only one vacancy in the 'sylum. A young man wanted. They wants one with a headpiece. I shouldn't think you knowed enough to apply."

The laughter of the men drowned any further speech.

"How much do you think *you* know?" demanded Armitage.

"More'n *you* do," said Billy, pursing his mouth

and his old complacence returning. "You don't know, I expect, that Mary Perry's dead."

A complete silence followed. Billy had the attention of the whole room.

"April fool!" said Collis at last.

"Who told you?" asked Armitage.

"Sam Perry, *he* told *me*," said Billy. "'And a better woman,' says he, 'never put a pair of boots on.'"

"What did she die of?" asked Fryatt.

"Died of a fit in the night," said Billy. "Thinks you knows everything, all of you lot."

John Fryatt put on his hat and left the bar.

"Where's he gone?" asked Collis after a moment.

"Can't say," said Armitage. In a few minutes John returned.

"It's quite true," he said. "I went down to Perry's just now and the blinds are down."

"Well, it's all to please God, I suppose," said Collis.

"It's a caution," said Armitage, and in the midst of the sensation he had caused, Billy took his leave with all his old self-satisfaction.

Chapter 34

IT was one of those warm and windless mornings in whose gentle heat new leaves unfold, buds drop their sheaths and the air is so entangled with the singing and calling of birds that the dawn appears to find its way with caution through the spaces of innumerable trembling and lyrical winds.

Clouds float at a little distance as if lingering to see whether they will be wanted before taking themselves off altogether. Fields are full of long silent grass and the quietening effect of warm sunshine lies upon the country at noonday.

Mary Huniset always "told the time," by which she meant the particular hour of half past six in the morning, by the slamming of the lid on Hepzibah Hewlett's water-tank. At that hour Hepzibah ran downstairs in her bodice and petticoat and, having filled her kettle for Robert's breakfast, let fall the lid of her tank and nipped back into the house lest she should be caught in such raiment by Collis the milkman on his way back from the station with his empty milk cans.

This morning Mary Huniset, instead of saying to herself "another half hour," rose and dressed,

but in spite of the fact that she had important news which she wanted to deliver before anyone else had made the discovery, she loitered until a small gathering of women was apparent near the pump, before she, too, seized her water jug and opened her garden gate.

The women were talking without any appearance of haste, with serious faces, as people do after a street accident. Two such startling calamities as the accident to Mr. Paul and Mary Perry's sudden death were justification enough for loitering. There was nothing to be done, but it was a comfort to know that one's neighbour thought exactly as oneself about the matter. Hepzibah Hewlett was there, having frankly come to talk and for no other purpose. As Mrs. Huniset appeared walking towards the group she laughed her sardonic chuckle and said :

" Here comes the white hen that never laid astray." A malicious titter ran through the group and it was a row of critical faces which turned to greet the gossip. Seeing their expression Mrs. Huniset did not prolong her effect.

" You've heard Mary Perry's dead, I suppose ? " she began.

" Last night, wasn't it ? " said Hepzibah laconically.

" Well, *Ellen Perry's come !* " said Mrs. Huniset. Even Hepzibah was startled from her disdain.

"Ellen Perry!" exclaimed one woman after another.

"Why, I was at school with *her*," said Mrs. Hall.

"She's been housekeeper to Lady Eade for years," said another woman.

"I wonder if she's stopping long," said a third.

"She's got two boxes and a band box," replied Mrs. Huniset. "I happened to be going past the Perrys' late last night" (Hepzibah winked at Mrs. Hall) "and I saw Sam's eldest boy taking them out of the bus. I saw Ellen, too, but she didn't take any notice. She was dressed in black and I couldn't think who she was at first, and then I remembered her. It was very good black she had on; I suppose being housekeeper she'd have to dress in black anyway."

"Ain't it awkward when people die sudden like that," said Mrs. Hall. "You've barely time to get your black ready before the funeral."

"Well, next time I dies I'll tell you beforehand," said Hepzibah. The women laughed.

"Are you going to do anything about a wreath?" asked Mrs. Huniset.

"Primroses is over," said one of the women.

"Wallflowers and cowslips ain't," said Mrs. Hall.

"Mary Jane can get up in the morning and make one," said Hepzibah preparing to go. "I'm

glad Ellen Perry's come. A bit of management's badly wanted in that house, and she'll bring that if she brings nothing else. Ain't the mornings getting light now. Lighter by a cock's stride every day," and Hepzibah took her way back to her house.

Chapter 35

ELLEN PERRY gave a last glance at the various piles of clothing spread on chairs in the back bedroom. To judge from the expression on her face she was far from satisfied. She noticed that a pair of stockings was missing from one of the sets.

"Well, it's the best I can do for the present," she said resolutely, and shutting the door she went downstairs to the kitchen. Three of the girls were sitting there in that bewildered condition of childhood when calamity beyond their understanding has overtaken them.

"Who's fed the pig?" asked Ellen. The children looked at each other.

"My mother's dead," said one.

"That's no reason the pig should die too, is it?" asked Ellen. "Now you, Nellie, just see to it at once, and have you put the fowls up? No. You go and see to it, Mary; and Jessie, I want you upstairs. Make haste, now, all of you."

The girls went about their tasks. They were a little astonished by their aunt's vigorous ways, but had no fear of her. She had brought too many substantial things to eat into the house for

any doubts to be entertained about her good intentions.

"Is that your father back?" asked Ellen, opening the door as the sound of wheels in the yard became audible. She shut it again on the instant, having caught a glimpse of Mrs. Huniset. Sam entered the kitchen from the yard door.

"Everything done?" asked Ellen.

"I think so," replied Sam with brevity.

"Then come and get your tea," said his sister.

She looked at him from time to time as he ate his meal, and when the children returned from the yard sent them on further errands. She offered no consolation nor attempted any words of sympathy. When he had finished she asked further.

"Is it half-past eleven, you've fixed?"

"Yes," said Sam.

"I must get the children to bed in good time, to-night," said Ellen. "We shall have to be up early to-morrow."

Sam made no reply. Ellen left him and went in search of the children.

Chapter 36

TWO evenings later, Sam Perry and his sister sat alone in the kitchen. Ellen, her vigorous hard person erect and untired, was occupied with the inspection of a pile of miscellaneous children's clothing which lay on the table. Sam, his pipe in his mouth, was apparently resting after the confusion and fatigue of his recent experiences, but from the embarrassed glances he cast from time to time in his sister's direction it was evident that he expected some manifestation from her and was apprehensive of its nature. With the same unmoved absorption in her task, Ellen sorted garment after garment, and it was in the matter-of-fact tone in which she might have announced that Billy's trousers were worn past mending that she said presently without ceasing from her work: "Well, I've thought it over, Sam, and I'll stop with you—"

Sam's face showed immediate relief and he settled to his pipe. Ellen cast a sharp glance at him and went on,

" I'm not Mary, you know—"

Sam interrupted gruffly, " Leave Mary alone."

Ellen continued, " I've nothing to say about Mary. I said all I'd got to say when you took up with the poor creature at first. You knew what I thought then and you know now what I've thought ever since. I've never found occasion to alter my judgment. But if I'm going to come here and look after you as I did before you were foolish enough to get married in that style, it's to be share and share alike. If it isn't, off I go again. You must carry your own pack and carry it steady. It's not going to be a case of *your* convenience. Those aren't *my* children. They're *yours*. I'll help you to fit them out. I'll look after their clothes and their food, and I'll do anything in reason for them, but don't you forget that they're your children in the long run and not mine. They're strong and healthy enough, but they want a lot of training. It's no use going back on what has been. Never was. But we must have a proper understanding about them and it must be taken in hand at once, and you must do your share."

" What do you want me to do ? " asked Sam.

" There's to be no behaving as though *you* hadn't got a family and *I* had," said Ellen. " No running off down to publics and leaving every-

thing to me." Sam fidgeted. "There'll be no occasion to say you're uncomfortable and dirty at home, because you won't *be* uncomfortable nor dirty either. *I'll* see to that," said Ellen. "There's nine children. Four of them will have to go to school for a while yet and there's the baby. I'll train Jessie at home. It's as much for her as for you that I'm stopping here. Lady Eade told me I was a fool for giving up a well-paid post to come here, and I daresay she's right, but I always *was* foolish where you were concerned, Sam, and you've always got round me whatever you've done. But it was that little Jessie that settled it. As soon as I saw that good little thing I said to myself, 'I'm not going to leave that child with all that weight on her shoulders.' It's not all for you either, Sam. I'll be honest. I shall be glad of a place of my own. You get tired of seeing other people's homes and handling other people's furniture. I could make this as happy a home as it's possible to find anywhere. I know I *could*, and I'll *do* it if *you* do your share of it. If I find you don't—off I go back to my work and no looking back after it." Ellen paused a moment and then resumed, "And now what's all this about the bus? I haven't been here three days without hearing it all over the place. First that Mary Huniset, and then the children one after another. I can hear everywhere what

everybody *thinks* about it, but I can't make out what's happened."

Sam, with visible relief on his face at the solving of his domestic riddle and having been let off more easily than he had expected by his plain-spoken sister, told the story of the bus from its sordid beginning. Ellen examined garments steadily.

"What are you going to do?" she asked, when Sam had finished. Sam was obviously taken aback.

"Nothing!" he said, with an embarrassed glance at his sister.

"Umph," observed Ellen.

"Well, what *could* I do?" asked Sam in defence. "Bill Turner won't stop his bus and I don't see why *I* should; I didn't begin no quarrelling. It was all done over my head."

"What sort of a man is this Turner?" asked Ellen.

"Oh, it's no use *you* thinking you can go and talk him over," said Sam confidently. "Mr. Paul, he went and come away crying, by all accounts. *You* won't alter old Bill."

"Is that the Mr. Paul that was here talking to Mary when her father died?" asked Ellen.

"Yes, that's him. I forgot you was here then," said Sam.

"Well, if *he* couldn't persuade, I don't know

who could," said Ellen. There was a short silence.

"Well, you've done nothing so far. What are you going to do *now*?" asked Ellen.

"Well, what would you do yourself?" demanded Sam adroitly enough.

"I'll tell you one thing that I *wouldn't* do," returned Ellen, "and that is to cut off my nose to spite my face. Here are you with nine children to bring up, thinking you can afford to behave as though you've a million of money to satisfy your pride on." Ellen was silent for some moments. Sam broke the silence a little sulkily.

"You've told me what you *wouldn't* do. How about what you *would* do?" he asked.

Ellen laid down the last garment on the pile she had placed on one side, and sat upright, letting her hands fall on the table.

"It's no use being sulky with each other, Sam," she observed. "You're in a difficult place and it's not the first time you've looked to me to get you out; but as I said at the beginning, unless you take your share of the difficulty it's no use looking to me. What puzzles me about men is the *childishness* of them. It's the same with gentle as well as simple. They never seem to know what's important and what isn't. If there's a little thing to fight for they're sure to fight about that, no matter who goes to rack and ruin. But there's

no altering of men, that I could ever find. What *is* important is your pride. You can't afford it, and you're better without it. Did you never think of doing anything else ? "

" Mr. Paul and Henry got at me to start a vegetable round," admitted Sam.

" Well, why don't you ? " asked Ellen.

" Why should I ? " said Sam. " Bus driving's been my business for twenty years and I'm not going to be made to stop by Bill Turner."

" How's the bus going ? " asked Ellen.

" It'll last my time," said Sam.

" Will it last Billy's, and John's, and Alfred's ? " asked Ellen. Sam was silent.

" Now look here, Sam," said his sister. " It's not for you that I'm come here to manage, but for those children. You live here for twenty years without interference, and you take for granted that nobody's ever going to interfere with you. What you've got to concern yourself with now is this competition. Never mind the bet. It makes it more unpleasant, but it's just come in time to show you that you can't settle down to things as they were. You're not an old man, yet, and you can just begin to work things up for those three boys to take on where you leave off."

At the sound of footsteps and a knock at the door Ellen broke off and looked at her brother.

"I don't know who it can be," he said, rising and crossing the room.

"Oh, it's you, Henry?" he exclaimed as he opened the door. "Come in," and Henry Jennet entered the room.

Chapter 37

HENRY advanced toward Ellen.

"My sister Ellen," said Sam. "Take a chair, Henry."

"I came to see how you all were," said Henry, seating himself. "It's always the first night or two that's so strange afterwards. It's hard to shut the door and go to bed. It's then you notice the gap most, when there's one outside that'll never come in again. I'm very glad to find you here, Miss Perry. There's nothing like one of your own at such times. Someone you can turn to. Are you making much of a stay?"

"I'm staying altogether," said Ellen, with composure.

"Well, and I *am* relieved to hear that," exclaimed Henry. "It's the best news I've heard for a long time. I *am* pleased, I can assure you. I couldn't sleep at night for thinking what Sam was going to do with those little children. It's God's work you're doing, Miss Perry, an it'll be blessed to you. It'll be good news to give Ruby, when I go home again. My heart feels as light again since I heard that."

"He's got to behave himself if *I* stop here," said Ellen, obviously gratified.

"Oh, he'll do that, Miss Perry," said Henry heartily. "I'm so glad I came in to-night. I've been all round those big houses I told you of, Sam, and it's just ready for you to begin. You know, Miss Perry, I do feel very much about those boys of Sam's. I don't know whether he told you of my idea and Mr. Paul's that he should begin another branch of his business to put the boys in training for it. I daresay he's told you about the bus?" Ellen nodded. "Well, Mr. Paul and I talked it over. There's not much of a future in it, especially as this new bus is started, and it's time Sam looked about for the boys. I don't know how you feel about it, Miss Perry. I'm sure your opinion must carry weight with Sam."

"Ellen's been at me already," said Sam, with a sheepish glance at his sister.

"I've told him that so long as he does *his* share with the children, I'll stop with him, but the minute he gives over, off I go. He can't afford to pamper his pride over this bus, and if he could, it isn't as if he's made a fortune out of it, or likely to," said Ellen.

"That's it, that's it," said Henry. "With all this competition here and everywhere the lads will have to go away from home to find work if they

don't get it here, and it's not always they come back to you, Sam. Think what *I'd* give to have my boy about me in my old age. I *do* thank God for a good daughter, but oh, my boy, if I could see you and know you were doing well, I would go through years of pain for it. If you could just put aside this soreness of yours about the bus, Sam! You know when Mary was lying cold upstairs it didn't seem such a very big thing, after all, that Bill Turner made that bet. See if you can't keep it like that, in its proper place.

"And perhaps this is the way just to defeat that evil intention," added Henry, adroitly. "You were to be ruined in two years' time, weren't you? Well, how if you're better off than ever in two years' time? There'd be something in it then, Sam, wouldn't there?"

"I shall have to give in between you two and Mr. Paul," said Sam with a short laugh. "But how it's to be done is another thing. Where's another horse to come from, and a cart?"

"Have you saved nothing?" asked Ellen. Sam was silent, and indeed it seemed a cruel question even to Henry.

"Well, *I* have!" continued Ellen after a pause. "And if you promise me to put your mind and back into it, and do your best to work up a connection for those two biggest boys anyway,

you shall have anything in reason to fit them out."

Sam suddenly rose, put his pipe in his pocket and left the two seated in the room. As he passed through the door into the yard they heard a sob break from him. Ellen looked after him.

"Did you ever see a pair of trousers like that?" she asked, holding up to view a pair of woe-begones for Henry's inspection, from the pile on the table. Henry rose from his chair.

"They're pretty far gone," he said, "but I expect if anybody can put them to rights it'll be you. Well, I *have* got some good news to carry home to Ruby, Miss Perry. If only I could be sure about Mr. Paul I should only have one thing left to wish for in this world."

"Is Mr. Paul ill, then?" asked Ellen, rising also.

"I don't like the look of Mr. Paul, at all," he said. "Before that piece of mischief in the lane, you'd have taken a lease of his life. But he's never been the same man since that night. I don't know whether he's got proper advice or not. I wish he'd get it. That pain's never seemed to heal up as it should. It'll be a dreadful thing if the only person that suffers over this quarrel is Mr. Paul."

"You're all babies together, you men," said

Ellen. " Mr. Paul's as bad as the rest of you. I don't know what you'd all come to if it wasn't for women."

"Well, no, *I* don't either," said Henry. "Good-bye, Miss Perry, good-bye. I look forward to the time when everybody in this house'll bless God for having brought you here. I have a load off my mind already. Good-night," and Henry took his leave.

Chapter 38

IT was one of those early summer mornings when one is impressed by the animation of every outdoor thing. The restlessness of pushing and sprouting life seemed everywhere. The light itself seemed to race from the wind, emptying and filling the sky with intense and sudden glory. All the happy life of the hedgerow and field, the triumphant singing of the birds, blue drifts of smoke against a steadfast horizon with sunny journeying clouds, the scent of cowslips and the sudden blue banks of violets all told of the happiest time of hope and promise in the year.

The Doctor's London friend had come and gone, and Mr. Paul, walking along his customary road to Wiat, was bearing the weight of his sentence. He was grave as he walked, thinking now of the details which a man must remember when he learns that he must set his house in order. For Mr. Paul was to die, and that not at the end of a reasonable length of years after work well accomplished, but in full vigour of life with his work stretching out, scarcely begun, before him. He was sorry. It seemed as though he could have

done so much more. His feet rang firmly on the ground as he walked. His hand seemed as muscular and warm as ever. The sunshine and gaiety invigorated him as it had done a week ago when he trod this very lane. He smelt the wall-flowers as he passed a cottage garden. He heard the blackcap singing in the oak tree. He had never seemed to be more vigorously alive in every faculty. Yet he must die, and that from clumsy joking and clownishness. Why should a string stretched across the road by two slow-witted rustics put an end to a life which was willing and able to work the works of God. He struggled with the feeling of a workman dismissed through misunderstanding or injustice. He tried at once to put away the feeling of being hurt. He was bewildered a little by the contrast between his present vigour and the death to come, and that within a period set. Just as he had learnt to live he must now learn to die. He knew nothing of sickness, nor did he know all the anguish that he should endure before the vigorous stalwart body to which he was so accustomed should be reduced to cry out for death to come speedily. He passed two men on the road who greeted him as they went on. Strange how he felt a man apart, a man sharing in a solemnity. "This mortal must put on immortality." He smiled content with the thought. He would but

follow the Lord. Should he not be more than satisfied to follow Him whithersoever He led? If in life, good. If to a more abundant life elsewhere, better. "So shall we be ever with the Lord."

Chapter 39

IT was not long before the village learnt of Mr. Paul's condition, not long before the failure of his vigour was manifest as he came and went among them. Consternation spread from one to the other and a universal blame was assigned in liberal manner to Turner. Then, for human life is an obstinate thing, it was seen that there still remained things that could be done. Perhaps, even this growth could be cured. One heard of a remedy here, another there. But those familiar with disease were silent. The unmistakable sign was there in the face of the minister itself.

"I have finished my work, Henry," said Mr. Paul, one day seated in a chair which now gave him no rest, and Henry, unable to speak, adjusted

the cushions and raised his friend's arms to an easier position. Mr. Paul had few relatives living and it was Henry's warmest wish to care for the minister till the end come. Mr. Paul, unable to resist the generous man, removed his few belongings to the shoemaker's cottage.

As he lay there, week after week, Henry had noticed what is sometimes perceptible when the weakness of the body becomes pronounced—a return to the speech and accent of childhood. The dying minister would speak in the tone and accent of the countryside in which he was born.

In the room in which he lay in the anguish of disease, there was neither quietness nor taste. The windows were small and admitted little of the outside air. The wall paper ran riot in poppies and twining convolvulus. The heavy knitted coverlet lay like a coffin lid upon his starting limbs. The sounds of altercation from the street reached his ears as he lay in anguish. But Mr. Paul was so familiar with the kind of room in which he was to suffer that only tranquillity possessed his mind. They had, at his request, "opened his window toward the sun rising," and there through an endless summer ebbing imperceptibly toward autumn Mr. Paul endured his mortal suffering.

And now it became evident that the care of the dying man was upon the hearts of a very wide

neighbourhood. Children would leave offerings as they came to school. Bunches of ferns or garden flowers still hot from the tight clutch of small hands—fowls or fruit, cordials, home-made wines, and here and there a peach or nectarine wrapped carefully to keep untouched its bloom. Women offered Ruby little comforts for the bed, sweet smelling herbs were brought constantly by Betty Betch. The men would stop Henry and Ruby in the street. It was as if by clumsiness now irretrievable they had broken some precious and irreplaceable thing.

"Could you send them a message, Sir?" asked Henry, one day.

"Surely, surely," said Mr. Paul faintly. "Tell them not to be distressed any longer. I've played pranks, too, when I was a boy. But let them be careful. Sometimes affairs get beyond our control. Don't let them be troubled or sorry about *me*. I have all things and abound."

It was high summer, each day filled to its limit with sunshine so that it seemed not a separate day, but one day prolonged infinitely and perpetually at the zenith. The narrow window framed a receding landscape of pasture-fields with hills faint in the heat. Mr. Paul lay in the shadowed room and watched the season transform the sunlit fields. They lay beyond him like a joy escaped. They were almost a symbol

of his own life slipping beyond his grasp. On such a day, late in the summer, the narrow open slit revealed a day so windless and a sky of such profound silence and blue depth that one seemed to be looking on a painted landscape. Each object was so still that one had time to observe everything, turning the eyes with leisure upon one discovery after another as in the selected range of a rich picture. The flooding sunlight seemed immortal. One could not conceive an end to a day in which nothing moved, in which the limitless blue heaven showed no change, in which the hills stood perpetually without shadow. Then a thin line of blue smoke rose above the horizon, so faint as to be almost imperceptible, but it moved, and Mr. Paul thought of the life that was going on still outside, of the life that would go on when his own had ceased.

He had failed, then? The quarrel was not appeased nor the country made much better for his work for his Lord. Turner would still browbeat the neighbours. Mrs. Huniset would still take her pleasure in scandal. Perry would still drink. The same chafferings and suspicions, and paltry, ignoble aims would go on. Hepzibah Hewlett would still wear her vituperative powers threadbare within the actual hearing of Mr. Paul, even as he lay there enduring, "as seeing Him Who is invisible."

Yet at the hour when he finally felt himself detached from life and its concerns, so that he seemed to be living in a room apart—separated as in a ship bound for a far continent yet within a few feet of the quay and within speaking distance of those on shore—in that hour anger, resentment, passion, which are for the living who have yet things to lose or gain, withdrew finally from him. It was not the solemnity of the approach to judgment, nor the joy of abiding continually in the presence of God which posssessed him in this hour. It was the final reward and achievement of the Christian which was granted to his faithful and candid heart before his mortal pain. He saw mankind as they appear to the loving kindness of God, even the men who had frustrated his efforts after good, not as evil, but as bewildered and stumbling. He saw them as he had seen them in the vision of his ministry, as sheep having no shepherd, when his ardent soul had yearned to be their guide in the steps of his Master. Now, he lay apart, lifted above, his heart enlarged to understand the ways of God Who maketh His sun to shine on the evil and the good.

When Collis, the milkman, passed the house at five o'clock in the morning and saw Ruby Jennet talking to Betty Betch in the garden, where both women were gathering white sweet peas, he paused.

Ruby raised her head, saw Collis and nodded sadly. He passed on with downcast face to bring up the cows. Returning he met Betty, who spoke to him in the lane.

" I cannot cry," she said. " He looks so beautiful—as if he's come into his own at last."

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